The SEVEN SACRAMENTS

By REV. FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

The Sacraments were instituted by Christ. Every Catholic should know the origin, history, meaning of the ceremonies and effects of the Sacraments.

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What They Are. What They Do.

By
REV. FRANCIS J. O'CONNELL, C.SS.R.

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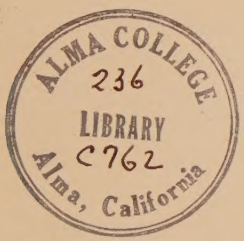

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THE SACRAMENTS

I

DEFINITION AND NUMBER

THE word *sacrament* is derived from the Latin noun *sacramentum.* Among the ancient Romans, this noun signified *a sacred obligation* —for example, the oath of allegiance to the state taken by soldiers. In the early centuries of the Christian era the term *sacrament* was used to denote any sacred thing that was an external manifestation of God's inscrutable power or of the workings of His grace in the souls of men. Thus, the mysteries of our faith, the Lord's Prayer, the ceremony of exorcism, etc., were called *sacraments* by the writers of that period. But from the twelfth century *sacrament* has been used in a more restricted sense—namely, to signify *an external sign of grace, instituted by God, for the sanctification of mankind.* It is in this sense that we employ the word *sacrament* in this treatise.

It is very fitting that the Almighty should choose external signs whereby to manifest and to communicate His grace to men. Man is so constituted that ideas and inspirations normally present themselves to his soul only through the instrumentality of his bodily senses. All communications

between human beings are conducted by external signs—for example, by speech, writing, gestures. We employ many conventional signs to express our inward feelings. We wear black garments as a sign of mourning; we bow to a superior as a sign of respect; we shake hands as a sign of friendship. Therefore, in establishing the sacraments God has adapted His mode of manifesting the sanctification of human souls to the manner of communication natural to mankind. Thus, for the sacrament of Baptism, God chose the ceremony of washing the body with water, which is a very appropriate symbol of the spiritual cleansing that is effected by this sacrament. For the sacrament of Extreme Unction, which is directed to restore to the soul perfect spiritual health, He prescribed a rite symbolizing healing—the anointing of the body with oil.

Even before the time of Christ, there were sacraments. The rite of circumcision was an external sign prescribed by the Almighty to purify the male descendants of Abraham from sin, and to incorporate them among the chosen people (Gen. xvii.). The various purifications commanded by the Mosaic law in the book of Leviticus were also sacraments, for they were enjoined by God as signs of the remission of sin merited by the truly contrite of heart. However, these sacraments of the Old Law possessed less power to sanctify than those of the New Law, inasmuch as they did not

of themselves confer grace, but merely inspired good dispositions in the recipients (p. 26).

That the Christian religion possesses sacraments for the sanctification of its adherents is admitted by all who profess to be Christians. Indeed, it is very evident from the pages of the New Testament that Jesus Christ provided some external means of conferring grace on those who would accept His doctrines. For the spiritual rebirth of the soul to the life of grace, He prescribed the external washing of the body with water—Baptism—which all must receive in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (John iii. 5; Matt. xxviii. 19). For the preservation and the strengthening of the life of grace, He gave the Holy Eucharist—His own Body and Blood under the visible appearances of bread and wine, which are a most appropriate symbol of the spiritual nourishment received by those who partake devoutly of this heavenly Food (John vi. 51-59; Luke xxii. 19, 20).

Seven Sacraments

However, among those who profess the Christian religion there is a disagreement as to the *number* of sacraments pertaining to the New Law. Protestants generally hold that there are only two —those we have just mentioned, Baptism and the Eucharist (which they call the Lord's Supper). The Catholic Church teaches as an article of faith

that the Christian sacraments are seven in number —Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.

As we just saw, Baptism and the Holy Eucharist are clearly mentioned in the New Testament; but there are also texts that allude to the other five as external signs of grace. Confirmation was conferred on the people of Samaria by the Apostles Peter and John, through the imposition of hands and prayer (Acts viii. 15-17). Penance was instituted when Christ gave the Apostles the power to forgive and to retain sin (John xx. 22, 23). Extreme Unction is described by St. James, when he prescribes that the priests of the Church shall be called to the sick, to anoint them with oil and to pray over them (James v. 14, 15). Holy Orders is the rite referred to by St. Paul when he admonishes his fellow-bishop St. Timothy to stir up the grace of God which is in him, by the imposition of his (St. Paul's) hands (2 Tim. i. 6). Matrimony among Christians is designated by St. Paul as a symbol of the grace-giving union of Christ with the Church (Eph. v. 25-32).

We do not claim that these texts prove *conclusively* the sacramental nature of all the rites in question. But these statements of the Sacred Scripture must be taken in conjunction with the testimony of divine Tradition, which is as truly the word of God as are the written pages of the

Bible. Now, the writings of the Fathers who lived in the early centuries, and the books employed by the primitive Church in the sacred functions testify that the seven ceremonies we have enumerated were regarded from the first days of Christianity as divinely established signs of grace.

Another argument for our doctrine is the fact that the Oriental Christians who are separated by heresy or schism from the Catholic Church—and these number more than 100,000,000—all recognize the same seven sacraments that are venerated by Catholics. The secession of the Eastern Churches from Catholic unity began in the fifth century, hence their agreement with us on this matter proves that the doctrine of the sevenfold number of the sacraments must have been acknowledged as a divinely revealed truth by all Christians in the earliest centuries. For, the antagonism of these Oriental Christians to Catholicity would have deterred them from accepting any doctrine not clearly contained in the deposit of revelation which was introduced by the Catholic Church subsequent to their separation.

II

THE NATURE OF THE SACRAMENTS

EVERY Christian sacrament is composed of two elements—things and words. By *things* are here meant not only inanimate objects, such as water and oil, but also external human actions, such as the imposing of hands and the confessing of sins. The *words* to which we refer are those spoken by the person who confers the sacrament. In theological language, the things essential to a sacrament are called its *matter,* and the words are called its *form.* For example, the matter of Baptism is the water, poured on the head of the recipient by the one baptizing; and the form of this sacrament is the words, spoken by the latter: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

The words of the sacramental form must be *spoken,* so that it would not suffice if they were expressed in writing or in the sign language. The one exception to this rule is the sacrament of Matrimony, in which the consent of the contracting parties—which constitutes both the matter and the form of this sacrament—can be manifested, not only by speech, but also by signs or in writing. The reason for this is, because Christian Matrimony is simply the natural marital contract, elevated to the dignity of a sacrament; hence, like any human contract it can be sealed by any manifestation what-

soever of rational consent. (The *matter* of some sacraments is also composed, under normal conditions, of spoken words—for example, the confession of sins. This may be supplied, when necessary, by signs or by writing).

In order to constitute a sacrament, matter and form must be united; and for this, it is necessary that both be placed at the same time, or at least that one follow the other so closely that the two can be said to be practically simultaneous. Accordingly, if a person, in conferring Baptism would first pour the water, and only after the lapse of several minutes would say the requisite words, the sacrament would be null and void.

Both matter and form of a sacrament must be placed by the *same person.* Thus, if two would share the administration of Baptism, one pouring the water and the other pronouncing the words, the sacrament would not be given. There are two exceptions to this rule—Penance and Matrimony. The matter of the former is necessarily placed by the recipient, for it is composed of the three acts of the penitent—confession, contrition (externally expressed) and the fulfillment of the sacramental penance; while the form of this sacrament is the absolution from sin pronounced by the priest. In Matrimony, the matter is the *giving* of conjugal consent by each of the contracting parties; and the form is the *acceptance* of that consent by the other. From this it can be seen that when two Christians

contract marriage, each furnishes the matter for his or her own reception of the sacrament, and at the same time supplies the form of the sacrament received by the other. Thus, each confers on the other the sacrament of Christian Matrimony.

Change of Matter or Form

If words or things *essentially different* from the proper matter and form are employed, the sacrament is not given. Thus, Baptism could not be given with milk or wine, in place of water. A priest could not consecrate barley bread into the Body of Christ for the Holy Eucharist, because *wheaten* bread is the necessary matter of this sacrament. Again, Baptism would be null and void if the one administering the rite would simply say, while pouring the water: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," omitting the essential phrase, "I baptize thee." On the other hand, a slight change of matter or of form would not nullify the sacrament, although to make such a modification deliberately would be a sin. Such would be the case if a very small amount of wine were added to the baptismal water, or if the one baptizing were to say "battize," instead of "baptize."

A very practical conclusion from these points is, that if one is ever called on to baptize an infant in danger of death (when no priest can be had),

he should be extremely careful to procure *pure* water—not necessarily *holy* water—to pronounce the words *while* pouring the water on the child's head, and to say most exactly every word of the form "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

III

THE AUTHOR OF THE SACRAMENTS

It is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith that Jesus Christ was both God and Man. In other words, He possessed two perfect natures—the one divine, the other human. Under both aspects He is the author of the seven sacraments of the New Law. As God, in union with the Father and the Holy Ghost, He is the principal cause of the sacraments and of all the graces that are bestowed through them. For supernatural grace is a participation of the divine nature; hence, all graces, as well as the external signs through which they are conferred, must depend for their existence and their efficacy principally on the divine nature, which is God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Under this aspect, the sacraments of the Old Law also had God for their author.

But likewise as Man—that is, in His human nature, united to and dependent on His divine personality—Jesus Christ was the author of the seven Christian sacraments. This means that during His life of three and thirty years on earth He designated these seven external rites as means of grace, to be used by the faithful until the end of time. That He instituted Baptism and the Holy Eucharist is clearly stated in the Gospels, as we saw above (p. 5). Moreover, every unprejudiced

person must admit that the sacrament of Penance, as it is administered in the Catholic Church, is implied in the commission given to the Apostles by their Master on the day of His Resurrection: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John xx. 22, 23).

The New Testament does not furnish convincing arguments that the other sacraments were instituted by Christ in person. However, this is no proof that He is not their author. St. John tells us that Jesus did many things that are not related in the New Testament (John xxi. 25); and in the Acts of the Apostles (i. 3) we read that during the forty days between His Resurrection and His Ascension, Our Lord frequently appeared to the Apostles and gave them instructions regarding the constitution and the management of His Kingdom on earth, the Church. Moreover, there are abundant proofs from early Tradition that Christ personally instituted all seven sacraments. St. Augustine even ventures to give a reason why Our Lord did this Himself, instead of committing the power to do so to the rulers of His Church—because, if some mere man possessed so great a power, we should be tempted to place our hope of salvation in him rather than in God (In Joan., Tr. v., n. 7).

Seven Sacraments by Divine Decree

From this it follows that the Church can never abrogate any of the seven sacraments nor add any of her own choosing; for it is by Christ's unalterable decree that these seven and only these shall be the external signs of grace in His Church until the end of time. The sacramental system, therefore, is an essential component of the Church as established by Our Divine Redeemer. St. Paul tells us that the Church is, in a certain sense, the Body of Christ. Applying this figure to the present matter, we can say that the sacraments are the arteries of this Mystic Body, through which the life-giving Blood of the Savior is transmitted to the members of His Church.

The matter and the form of at least some of the sacraments were specifically determined by Christ Himself. He prescribed, for example, that the matter of Baptism should be the laving of the body with water, and that the form should denote that the recipient is being spiritually cleansed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Again, He specified that the matter of the Holy Eucharist should be wheaten bread and wine from the grape, and that the form should be the words that He himself used at the Last Supper to change these elements into His Body and Blood (Luke xxii. 19, 20). We are not sure, however, that Our Lord determined so explicitly the essen-

tial constitutives of all the sacraments. Some theologians think that in the case of certain sacraments—especially Confirmation and Holy Orders—He merely decreed that there should be such sacraments, productive of certain definite effects, but left to the rulers of His Church the right to determine what things and words should constitute the matter and form of these sacraments, and also the right to change these constitutive elements when they deemed such modification feasible. Considerable probability is given to this view by the fact that the Church seems actually to have modified the matter and form of some sacraments in the course of time. For example, Sacred Scripture (Acts viii. 17; xix. 6) and the literature of the early Church make reference to the imposition of hands as the entire matter of Confirmation; while nowadays the anointing of the brow with chrism is also essential to this sacrament.

The variety of effects produced by the seven sacraments gives striking proof of our loving Savior's earnest wish to provide us with special graces for the principal phases and contingencies of our earthly exile. For our birth to the supernatural life of grace, He has given us Baptism; for our spiritual maturity, Confirmation; for the nourishment of our souls, the Holy Eucharist; for the cleansing of our soul and the restoration of the life of grace, if we fall into sin, Penance. For those who choose to enter the married state, He has insti-

tuted the sacrament of Matrimony; for those called to the exalted dignity of the sacred ministry, Holy Orders. Finally, He established Extreme Unction in order to comfort the soul of the dying Christian, to cleanse it of the dross of earthly imperfections, and to prepare it for a speedy entrance into His Kingdom of everlasting happiness.

IV

THE MINISTER OF THE SACRAMENTS

By the *minister* of a sacrament is meant the person who confers this sacred sign. Since God established the sacraments for mortal men, it is to men and not to angels that He has assigned the honorable task of conferring them. However, in a particular case, God could employ an angel (or a saint in heavenly glory) for this office. Thus, St. Stanislas Kostka received Holy Communion from an angel; and the same miraculous favor was granted to St. Gerard Majella.

Two of the sacraments—Baptism and Matrimony—demand no special priestly or sacred power in the minister. The former sacrament can be administered validly by any one,—even by one who is not himself baptized. However, a lay person is allowed to baptize only in a case of necessity, when an ordained minister cannot be had. Moreover, *solemn* Baptism—that is, with the accompaniment of the liturgical ceremonies such as anointing and exorcism—can be given only by a priest, or, with special permission, by a deacon. The ministers of the sacrament of Matrimony, as was stated above (p. 9), are the contracting parties themselves.

The other five sacraments can be administered only by duly ordained priests or bishops. This is clear from the practice of the Church from the earliest centuries. It is implied in Sacred Scrip-

ture—for example, Our Lord commissioned only the Apostles to consecrate the Holy Eucharist and to forgive sins; St. James commands that the *priests* of the Church be summoned to anoint the sick (James v. 14). Now, Bishops and, in a limited degree, priests are the successors of the Apostles in the sacred ministry. From the constant practice of the Church we know that priests can be the ministers of the Holy Eucharist, which they consecrate at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass,[1] of Penance, and of Extreme Unction; and that only a Bishop can be the ordinary minister of Confirmation and of Holy Orders. With the special permission of the Pope, a priest can confer Confirmation and the lower degrees of Holy Orders.

Intention and Dispositions of Minister

To confer a sacrament, the minister must have the *intention* of doing so. In other words, he must know that he is giving a sacred rite and must mean to give it. Thus, a priest who had lost his reason would not administer a sacrament, even though he performed the ceremony correctly. For, although the minister is but the instrument of the divine power, yet, he is an instrument endowed with reason and free will, and God wishes to use him in the giving of the sacraments, with the co-

[1] Of course, anyone can *give* the Holy Eucharist after It is consecrated; and in extraordinary circumstances it is lawful for a lay person to do so.

operation of these faculties, and not as one would use an inanimate instrument, such as a pen or a knife.

However, a sufficient intention is had by one who is distracted while he is giving the sacrament, provided he is acting in virtue of an intention previously elicited. Moreover, only a very meager knowledge of the sacrament he is giving and consequently, only a very general intention are required on the part of the minister. He may not even believe in the sacrament; yet, he can administer it. For example, a Jewish doctor can confer Baptism on a dying child (if he observes the proper rite), for, although he does not believe in the efficacy of this ceremony, yet he wishes to administer the rite that Christian parents provide for their children; and thus he has the required intention.

A sacrament can be validly administered by one who is in the state of sin. For, it must be remembered, it is God Who imparts grace through the sacraments, and His power is not weakened by the defects of His human agents. However, a priest would commit a great sacrilege if he were to administer a sacrament in the state of mortal sin.

No one can confer a sacrament on himself; for in the supernatural order, as in the natural order, God wishes us to depend to some extent on others for our well-being. Thus, an unbaptized adult could not baptize himself; a priest could not absolve himself from sin, nor, if he were dying, give

himself Extreme Unction. The one exception is the Holy Eucharist, which—as is evident from Its very nature—a person can give to himself, as the priest receives Holy Communion during the Sacrifice of the Mass

V

THE SUBJECT OF THE SACRAMENTS

By the *subject* of a sacrament we mean the person who receives it. Only human beings in their earthly stage of existence can be the subjects of the sacraments. The devils and the lost souls cannot receive them, because they have placed themselves beyond God's mercy; nor can the angels and the saints and the souls in Purgatory, because they have attained the completion of their measure of grace.

Infants—and under this designation are included all who have never attained the use of reason even though they may have reached bodily maturity—can receive Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist. This doctrine as regards Baptism is implied in the words of Christ, Who made the reception of this sacrament a necessary condition of entrance into the Kingdom of heaven (John iii. 5), and Who certainly wishes children to be saved. That the other two sacraments can be received by those who have not attained the use of reason is manifest from the practice of the early Church (which practice still prevails in the Oriental churches) of administering Confirmation and Holy Communion to infants immediately after Baptism. It is a proof of Our Lord's unbounded love for souls that He has given to these sacraments the power to confer their salutary effects on

those who are not yet capable of rendering free cooperation. Even the sacrament of Holy Orders could be received by a baptized male infant, though no Bishop would be permitted to give this sacrament to one not in possession of the use of reason. In the Latin Church at the present time only Baptism is ordinarily conferred on infants; although Confirmation can be given in extraordinary cases—for example, when a baby is in danger of death and a Bishop is at hand. (It must be noted that no one, whether adult or infant, is capable of any other sacrament until he has first received Baptism).

Reception by Adults

God has decreed, however, that adults—those who have attained the use of reason (which usually takes place around the seventh year),—shall not receive the benefits of the sacraments save with their own free cooperation. We must here distinguish carefully between the *valid* and the *fruitful* reception of a sacrament. A sacrament is *validly* received when it places some spiritual reality capable of producing grace in the subject's soul; it is *fruitfully* received when grace is actually produced by this spiritual factor. For example, a person receives Baptism validly when the character—which is a spiritual quality productive of grace—is impressed on his soul; he receives this sacrament fruitfully when the regenerating grace, consequent

on this character, is also infused. As is evident, a sacrament may be received validly, but at the same time may be unfruitful, because the subject is unworthy to receive grace into his soul.

To receive a sacrament *validly,* an adult must have the intention of receiving it. An intention once made—even in a general manner—and not retracted is sufficient, so that even one who is unconscious may validly receive the sacraments. For example, a practical Catholic who is severely injured and rendered unconscious can receive Extreme Unction, because, as the general tenor of his life showed, he intended to live and die as a Catholic, with the spiritual helps the Church provides for her children. However, consciousness is required for the reception of Matrimony and Penance, since for the former the recipient must give conjugal consent, and for the latter the penitent must make some manner of confession and express his contrition.

To receive a sacrament *fruitfully,* other dispositions of soul besides an intention are required of an adult. Here we must distinguish between the *sacraments of the dead*—so called because they are primarily intended to bestow the life of grace on souls that are spiritually dead in mortal sin—and the *sacraments of the living*—so called because they were established by Christ principally to increase grace in those souls that already possess this supernatural life. The sacraments of the dead are

Baptism and Penance; the sacraments of the living are the other five.

For the fruitful reception of one of the *sacraments of the dead,* an adult must have made acts of faith, hope, and especially contrition or sorrow for sin, which must extend to all, at least mortal, sins. It is sufficient if this contrition be *imperfect* —for example, inspired by fear of the eternal pains of hell which, as we are taught by revelation, are the lot of those who die in mortal sin. To receive fruitfully one of the *sacraments of the living,* a person must possess the state of sanctifying grace; for, as the very nature of these sacraments indicates, they are intended only for those who are spiritually alive by supernatural grace.

However, it is commonly held by theologians that in an extraordinary case a person in mortal sin can receive the sacraments of the living fruitfully, thus obtaining the remission of his sins and restitution to the life of grace. The case is that of the sinner who receives one of these sacraments without consciousness of his unworthiness and with imperfect contrition. (If his contrition were perfect, he would acquire the state of grace before receiving the sacrament). For example, a Catholic in mortal sin is stricken with a sudden and serious sickness, but before lapsing into unconsciousness makes an act of imperfect contrition. This act, though supernaturally good, is not of itself sufficient to procure for the sinner the state of

grace. The priest is summoned and imparts sacramental absolution; but since the sick man cannot confess or manifest externally his contrition, the efficacy of this absolution is very doubtful. But the priest also gives him Extreme Unction. This sacrament the sick man receives *validly* because—despite his moral lapses—he always retained the intention of dying as a Catholic. He also receives this sacrament *fruitfully* because of the efficacy of the sacramental rite joined to his imperfect contrition and to the fact that he is now unconscious of the condition of his soul. Thus, in an extraordinary way, through a sacrament of the living, a sinner recovers God's grace and receives the pardon of his sins; and if he dies without regaining consciousness, he is eternally saved. Of course, if he becomes conscious, he is obliged to confess his sins.

A similar case of the acquisition of grace by a sinner through a sacrament of the living would be that of a person who approaches Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin, but thinking he is in grace, and with imperfect contrition for all his sins.

VI

THE EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENTS

THE chief effect of the Christian sacraments is *grace*. There are two kinds of grace produced by these sacred signs—*sanctifying* and *sacramental*.

Sanctifying grace is a supernatural quality by which the soul is made in some manner a partaker of the life of God, and acquires a right to eternal happiness. The sacraments of the dead—Baptism and Penance—are primarily intended to give what is known as *first* sanctifying grace, or the infusion of this supernatural quality into a soul that is dead in sin. The sacraments of the living—the other five—are principally ordained to give *second* sanctifying grace, or an increase of this divine gift to one that already possesses it in some measure. Of course, the sacraments of the dead give second grace when received by one already possessing sanctifying grace (for example, a person going to confession with only venial sins on his soul); and as we saw above (p. 24), in certain extraordinary cases, the sacraments of the living can give first grace.

Besides sanctifying grace, every sacrament produces, when worthily received, a species of grace proper to itself, called *sacramental* grace. It stands to reason that each sacrament must bestow some special gift, distinct from the favors given by the other six, for otherwise there would be no need of seven different sacraments. This sacramental

grace principally consists in a claim to those special divine helps that are necessary for the fulfillment of the duties imposed by this particular sacrament. Thus, the sacramental grace of Baptism gives the recipient a right to obtain the assistance of God in fulfilling his obligations as a Christian; the sacramental grace of Holy Orders confers a right to the graces required for the performance of the duties of the priesthood. This sacramental grace may be productive of effects outside the supernatural sphere. For example, one of the special effects of Extreme Unction is bodily health, when this is conducive to the good of the soul.

How Sacraments Give Grace

Regarding the manner in which the sacraments produce grace, the Catholic doctrine is radically different from that of Protestants. These latter hold that the sacraments work on the soul *indirectly, through the dispositions that they inspire in the recipient* (in theological Latin, *ex opere operantis*). According to Protestant tenets, a sacrament is like a sermon or a holy picture, which inspires us with sentiments of faith, love of God, etc., through which dispositions we merit grace. Catholics hold that, although the sacraments of the Old Law worked in this manner (p. 5), those of the New Law produce grace *directly through a supernatural efficacy given them by God* (technically,

ex opere operato). We believe that when a person receives a sacrament with the proper dispositions God uses the sacrament as an instrument to beautify the soul of the recipient with His divine grace, just as the artist uses a brush to paint a picture on canvas. Water and oil and the other elements of the sacraments have no inherent power to confer supernatural grace, any more than the brush can, of itself, paint a picture; but the Almighty can certainly communicate the image of His divinity to the human soul through those material elements, just as the artist can transmit through the brush to the canvas a scene of beauty that his mind has conceived. Thus, though we call the sacraments *signs*, we hold that they are *practical* signs—that is, capable of producing the grace that they signify.

The Catholic Church bases this doctrine of the efficacy of the sacraments, first, on those passages of the New Testament that ascribe to the sacramental rites a far greater power than merely the inspiring of pious dispositions. Thus, Our Lord proposes the water of Baptism as the *cause* of man's spiritual regeneration (John iii. 5), and St. Paul speaks of the imposition of hands as the *cause* of the grace of Holy Orders (2 Tim. i. 6). Moreover, the custom of baptizing infants, which has been in the Church from the earliest times, cannot be explained in the Protestant view, for infants are incapable of being inspired to acts of faith, love of God, etc., by the external rite of the sacrament.

Therefore, the sacrament itself must possess through divine omnipotence the power to sanctify the recipient.

Required Disposition

It must not be forgotten, however, that it is a Catholic doctrine that, although the sacraments are divine instruments of grace, yet adults must dispose themselves by their own free cooperation before they can receive this grace (p. 24). The light of the sun causes objects to be visible, yet we cannot see them if we keep our eyes closed. So too, the sacraments are the causes of grace; but adults cannot partake of this grace unless they open their hearts by acts of faith, sorrow for sin, love for God, etc. And the more fervently a person prepares for the reception of a sacrament, the more abundantly will he partake of its sanctifying and sacramental grace.

The *revival* of the sacraments is a very consoling teaching of Catholic theology. This means that when a person has received certain of the sacraments unworthily and unfruitfully, he may later receive the grace of which he then deprived himself, provided he repents of his sins, and returns to God's friendship. This doctrine is certain in regard to Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders; and it is also generally held by theologians that Matrimony can revive as long as the married

pair are both living, and Extreme Unction as long as the recipient remains in the same danger of death in which he received this sacrament.

Besides producing sanctifying and sacramental grace, three of the sacraments—Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders—also imprint on the soul an indelible spiritual mark, called a *character*. This character is a participation of the priestly power of Christ. It is impressed whenever the sacrament is validly received—even though it be unfruitful—and cannot be blotted out during life, no matter what sins the recipient may afterward commit. Hence, these three sacraments once validly received can never be repeated. Theologians commonly teach that this character remains on the soul for all eternity, for the greater glory of those who are saved, for the greater humiliation of those who are lost.

* * *

We can never be sufficiently grateful to Our Heavenly Father for giving us through His Divine Son, Jesus Christ, the seven sacraments, to provide us with ample means of obtaining the forgiveness of our sins, an increase of grace and of virtue, strength in temptation, consolation in sorrow. The best way of expressing gratitude for a proffered gift is to make use of it; and thus should we testify to God our gratitude for the sacraments. True, some of these great gifts can be received only once;

others, only on special occasions. But there are two that are ours for the asking—Penance and the Holy Eucharist. Whenever we will, we can kneel before the priest to be absolved from the burden of sin, or even from the minor trangressions of our daily lives. And it is the unmistakable wish of Christ and of His Church that every dawn should find us at the altar-rail, receiving the Eucharistic Bread, come down from heaven. No wonder that they whose hearts Christ visits every morning can face each day the noisy world unafraid. If alluring temptations come, or staggering disappointments, or bodily pains, or mental woes—they can bear up bravely, for they know that there came into their souls this day not only grace, but the source of all graces, the living Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

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Introduction

MORE than nineteen centuries ago the Son of God became Man in order to make satisfaction to His heavenly Father for the sins of mankind and to open again to men the gates of God's kingdom in the life beyond the grave, which had been closed by the sin of our first parent, Adam. To accomplish this work, our divine Redeemer—known in His human nature as Jesus Christ—voluntarily accepted the cruel death of the cross, thus offering to His Father a propitiatory sacrifice of infinite value, the sacrifice of His own life.

During His earthly life Christ preached a body of religious doctrines and imposed on all men the obligation to believe them. He also established an organized religious society, known as a Church, which He commanded all to join. Finally, He instituted seven religious ceremonies—sacraments, they are called—to be used in His Church until the end of the world as a means of conferring on His followers the spiritual life of the soul, which is supernatural grace. These rites do not sanctify merely by stimulating those who participate in them to the performance of good and meritorious actions. They have a positive inherent power, as instruments of God, to impart their salutary effects to all who receive them, provided these individuals place no obstacle to their efficacy. Therefore, a sacrament can be briefly defined as "an outward sign instituted by Christ, having the power to give grace."

The Most Necessary Sacrament

The first and most necessary of the sacraments is Baptism. The word *baptism* comes from the Greek verb *βαπτίζειν*, which originally meant *to immerse* or *to plunge,* but later received the more general meaning of *to wash.* This sacrament joins one with the Church of Christ; it is also for every human being the ordinary means of acquiring for the first time the state of sanctifying grace. It is defined as "the sacrament whereby, through the bodily washing of a person with water in the name of the three divine Persons he is incorporated into the Church of Christ and born to the spiritual life of supernatural grace."

Every Catholic should be familiar with the principal doctrines of his Church on Baptism. The purpose of this pamphlet is to explain these doctrines by considering in order the history of Baptism, the rite by which it is administered, its effects and its necessity, and finally the minister and the recipient of this sacrament.

BAPTISM

BY REVEREND FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

THE HISTORY OF BAPTISM

The Institution of Baptism

Jesus Christ laid down two general conditions through the fulfilment of which a person can obtain eternal salvation. The first is an external condition, membership in the Church of Christ. The second is an internal condition, the possession of sanctifying grace. These two conditions can exist separately. A person can be a member of the Church, and yet not have sanctifying grace; and on the other hand, a person can, through no fault of his, be separated from the Church and yet be in the grace of God. However, it is Christ's will that normally these two should be united—that through union with the Church one should possess sanctifying grace.

Christ could have decreed that membership in the Church and the state of grace could be procured without any special external rite—merely by professing oneself a follower of our Saviour and making acts of faith and love. But it surely was more fitting that He should institute some external ceremony for this purpose. Men are more impressed by what appeals to their senses and, particularly when there is a question of joining a society with a most important object, a solemn rite of initiation seems called for. A reading of the life of our Lord as found in the Gospels will show that He did institute such a rite as a

means of admitting men into His Church and of enriching their souls with divine grace. Shortly after Christ began His public ministry a man named Nicodemus sought an interview with Him, to find out what our Lord required of those who wished to be His disciples. Christ replied that a man must be born again before he can see the kingdom of God—that is before he can be a member of Christ's kingdom on earth, the Church, which leads to the eternal kingdom of God in heaven. Nicodemus understood the phrase "to be born again" literally, and in amazement asked how this was physically possible. Our Saviour answered: "Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (*John,* III, 5). Evidently on this occasion Christ was speaking of a definite ceremony wherein a person would be washed with water and made a member of the Church. At the same time, through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, he would receive the life of grace in his soul by a kind of spiritual birth, just as by his natural birth a human being receives the life of the body.

Our Lord did not originate the use of bodily washing as a religious rite. God Himself had prescribed various ceremonial washings for the Jewish people (*Leviticus,* XV). Such ceremonies were found among the ancient pagans and are still practiced by some of the savage tribes of Africa. Water naturally lends itself as a symbol of spiritual cleansing. Shortly before Christ began His public ministry, St. John the Baptist had begun to baptize in the River Jordan those who heeded his call to penance. Our blessed Lord Himself, entirely innocent though He was, had received this rite from the hands of John. However, the baptism which Christ would institute, according to His promise to Nicodemus, would be of a far higher order than that of all other ceremonial ablutions. It would have the inherent power of sanctifying and be used for all time.

We do not know with certainty exactly when Christ instituted Baptism. In the early months of His ministry His disciples conferred a baptismal ceremony (*John* IV, 1, 2); but it is a disputed question among theologians whether this ceremony was the sacrament of Baptism, as we have it today, or only a figure of the sacrament. It is commonly held that the sacrament must have been instituted and put in use before the passion of our Saviour. For, at the Last Supper, He gave His apostles Holy Communion and raised them to the priesthood. Both of these ceremonies suppose, according to the general law of Christ, that the persons who receive them have been baptized. Our Lord could of course have made an exception to this law in the case of the apostles on that occasion, but there is no reason for believing He did so.

Certain proof that Christ instituted Baptism for all men was given when, just before His ascension into heaven, He assembled His apostles about Him and gave them the commission: "Going therefore teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (*Matthew,* XXVIII, 19). "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned" (*Mark,* XVI, 16). These words of our Saviour not only prove convincingly that He instituted the ceremony of Baptism, but also clearly indicate the importance He attached to this ceremony as a means of admitting all men into His Church and of placing them in the way of eternal salvation.

Baptism in the Church

On Pentecost Sunday, ten days after our Lord's ascension into heaven, the Holy Ghost, in the form of fiery tongues, came down upon the apostles, giving them light and strength for their sublime task of preaching the Gospel and spreading the Church of Christ to all nations. Immediately after receiving the Holy Ghost, the apostles began to preach the religion of Jesus Christ in the streets of

Jerusalem. When those who had been convinced by their preaching asked what they must do to embrace this new religion, St. Peter, the head of the apostles, answered: "Do penance and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins." And the inspired account continues: "They therefore that received his word were baptized; and there were added in that day about three thousand souls" (*Acts,* II, 38, 41).

The administration of Baptism is mentioned in many other passages of the New Testament recording the admission of converts into the Church. Thus, when the deacon Philip preached in Samaria, many of the inhabitants were baptized, both men and women. Philip also baptized an official of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, whom he converted to the faith by interpreting to him the sayings of the prophet Isaias as they were fulfilled in Christ (*Acts,* VIII, 12, 26-39). St. Paul, after he had been miraculously turned from a persecutor into an ardent lover of Christ, was baptized by a certain Ananias in Damascus (*Acts,* IX, 18). St. Peter baptized Cornelius and his household, the first fruits of the gentiles (*Acts,* X, 47). In the narrative of the missionary journeys of St. Paul the conferring of Baptism is often mentioned. And in his wonderful Epistles St. Paul speaks of Baptism as "the laver of water in the word of life" (*Ephesians,* V, 26), and "the laver of regeneration and renovation of the Holy Ghost" (*Titus,* III, 5). It is very evident that the Church of the apostolic age looked upon Baptism as the formal ceremony of initiation into the Christian religion, and a rite of vital importance for the sanctification and salvation of every human being.

This same idea of the importance of Baptism as the gateway to the Church and as an essential rite for the spiritual regeneration of the soul appears frequently in the writings of the early centuries: in the anonymous treatise known as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,* which dates from around the year 100; in the works of St. Irenaeus and Tertullian who lived in the second century; in those of

St. Cyprian and St. Firmilian who were bishops of the third century; and in those of St. Basil and St. Epiphanius who wrote in the fourth century.

It was always recognized that Baptism was instituted by Christ as a rite possessing the power to give grace by its own efficacy—that is, a sacrament. Indeed, so clearly is Baptism proposed in Scripture and in the tradition of Christianity as a ceremony of this nature that not only Catholics, but also practically all other Christians acknowledge it as one of the sacraments of the Christian dispensation. Yet, at the present day many Protestants underestimate the importance of Baptism and refuse to admit it is necessary for salvation.

In ancient days Baptism was usually administered to large groups in a very solemn manner on two occasions in the course of the Church year—the vigils of Easter and Pentecost. Nowadays this sacrament is generally given to individuals or to small groups, on any day of the year. However the two solemn occasions of olden times are still commemorated in the fact that it is only on the vigils of Easter and Pentecost that the water to be used in solemn Baptism is blessed. On these days, if possible, adult converts are baptized.

Among the mosaics and frescoes with which the catacombs were decorated during the first three centuries of the Christian era there are many portraying the administration of Baptism. Others refer to this sacrament by portraying incidents from the Old or New Testament which contain some application to Baptism, such as the deluge (which purged the world from sin), the passage of the Red Sea by the people of Israel (who reached the promised land through water), the Baptism of Christ by St. John, etc.

Until about the twelfth century Baptism was generally administered by immersion. Since that time infusion, or pouring, has been the ordinary method of conferring this sacrament in the Western Church.

THE RITE OF BAPTISM

We can distinguish in the rite of Baptism, as it is conferred solemnly in the Catholic Church, two classes of ceremonies—first, those which have been prescribed by Christ and are essential to the *valid* administration of the sacrament; second, those which have been added by the Church and do not pertain to the essence of the sacrament. The former are known as the *matter* and *form* of Baptism, the latter are simply called *ceremonies.*

The Matter and Form

In each of the seven sacraments the Church and theologians distinguish two essential elements known as the *matter* and the *form.* The matter is a material object or a human action, which is somewhat undetermined in its nature; the form is the formula of words spoken by the one who administers the sacrament, which determines exactly the purpose of the matter. In some sacraments—including Baptism—the matter can be again distinguished into *remote* matter (a material object) and *proximate* matter (the human action by which the remote matter or material object is applied). Thus we have three factors which by divine law necessarily must be present to constitute a true Baptism—the remote matter, the proximate matter and the form.

The remote matter of this sacrament is natural water, the fluid which is universally recognized as most suitable for cleansing purposes, and which is a most appropriate symbol of the spiritual cleansing effected by this sacrament. Our Lord affirmed the necessity of water on the first occasion when He mentioned Baptism, saying: "Unless a man be born again of *water* and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (*John,* III, 5). Some non-Catholics have claimed that the word *water* as used by Christ on this occasion is to be understood in a metaphorical sense, signifying an abundant outpouring of God's graces into the heart of man. This interpretation

is entirely arbitrary and false, as is evident from other passages of the inspired writings. In the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian official it is related that as he and Philip were on their way they came to a body of water, and the Ethiopian said: "See, here is water; what doth hinder me from being baptized" (*Acts,* VIII, 36). Again, after St. Peter had convinced the household of Cornelius of the truth of Christianity, he asked: "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?" (*Acts,* X, 47). Surely, *water* is to be understood in its literal sense in these texts.

A confirmatory argument is furnished by the explicit instructions concerning Baptism in the very ancient work *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles:* "Thus baptize ye: Having first said all these things (the Creed, the commandments, etc.) baptize into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living (running) water. But if thou have not living water, baptize into other water; and if thou canst not in cold, in warm. But if thou have not either, pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit" (Chap. 7).

From time to time in the course of the centuries false notions concerning the remote matter of Baptism have been offered. Thus, in the middle ages there were some religious fanatics who made use of fire or lighted candles instead of water for the ceremony of Christian initiation.* In the thirteenth century some of the simple Catholics of Norway conceived the idea that in case of urgent necessity, when water could not be procured, beer could be used to baptize an infant. Pope Gregory IX wrote a letter to them correcting this false notion. Martin Luther, in his book, *Table-Talk,* proposed the view that in case of necessity any liquid that might be used for washing—

* They derived this peculiar practice from a misunderstanding of the allegorical words of St. John the Baptist concerning Christ: "He shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire" (*Matthew,* III, 11).

such as milk or beer—would suffice as the matter of Baptism.

The Catholic Church has always consistently held that water is absolutely necessary for the *valid* administration of this sacrament. If some kind of water cannot be obtained, Baptism cannot be conferred. The water may be drawn from the ocean, a river or a lake; it may be rain-water or dew, or melted snow or ice; it may even be formed chemically from oxygen and hydrogen. For all these sources furnish the same product—natural water, recognized by all as suitable for the purposes of ablution. Such water is always sufficient for the *valid* administration of Baptism. Even though there is an admixture of some other element, such as sulphur, salt, iron, calcium, or even though the water is somewhat dirty, it can be used for *valid* Baptism provided water is the notably predominant element. Even very thin milk or weak soup could and should be used as *probable* matter, if it was the only liquid available and an infant were in danger of death.* Rich milk, heavy wine, etc., could not be employed, because they cannot in any sense be regarded as water. Even tears, saliva and perspiration could not be used for Baptism because, although chemically they are made up largely of water, they are not recognized by people as suitable materials for the purpose of washing—and this symbolism must be realized in baptizing.

For solemn Baptism—that is, Baptism conferred by an ordained minister of the Church with the various ceremonies which we shall describe below—water that has been specially consecrated by a priest is commanded to be used by ecclesiastical law. The holy oils—chrism and the oil of catechumens—are mixed with this water, which is blessed on the vigils of Easter and Pentecost. For private Baptism, given in danger of death, ordinary unblessed

* In such a case the Baptism should subsequently be repeated with certainly genuine water if possible,—conditionally, of course, on the non-validity of the previous administration.

water, such as is obtained from the well or the faucet—clean water, of course, if possible—should be used.

The proximate matter of Baptism is the washing of the body of the person to be baptized with water by the minister. According to Catholic teaching and practice, this can be done in one of three ways—by immersion, infusion or aspersion—in other words, either by plunging the person entirely into the water, by pouring water on his head, or by sprinkling him with water (in such manner that the head is moistened).

All admit that the first of these methods—immersion—certainly suffices for Baptism, because if a bodily washing is called for, undoubtedly the ablution of the entire body will fulfil this condition. But there are some Christians—especially the Baptists and the Orthodox Greeks*—who claim that total immersion is the *only* valid method of baptizing; consequently Baptism by infusion or aspersion is null and void. They argue principally from the word *baptize* which, they say, means *to plunge, to dip entirely.* They also assert that in the primitive Church Baptism was always given by immersion and that the other methods were adopted by Catholics in the course of time without any justification.

To these arguments we reply: First, the word *baptize* did *originally* mean *to immerse totally*—but later it acquired the more general meaning of *to wash,* even only *partially,* and at the time of Christ it was in common usage in this latter sense. Thus, in the fourth verse of the seventh chapter of the Gospel of St. Mark it is said that the Pharisees always *washed* before dinner; and in the original Greek text the verb used is *baptize;* yet from the second verse of the same chapter it is evident that only the *washing of the hands* is meant. Now, when Christ said that all must be *baptized,* He must have used

* The members of the Orthodox Greek Church are separated from the Catholic Church, chiefly because they refuse to recognize the supremacy of the Pope.

this word in the sense that was commonly attached to it at that time. And so, all that can be deduced from His command is that every one must receive a bodily ablution as a means to sanctification—but not necessarily an ablution of the *entire* body. It must be remembered too that the baptismal ablution is only a symbol through which God confers the spiritual cleansing of the soul. A partial washing is just as effective a symbol as a complete washing.

Secondly, there is nothing in Scripture to indicate that in the Church of the apostolic period complete immersion was always used or was regarded as necessary for the administration of Baptism. On the contrary, there is an account of one baptismal ceremony, at least, in which immersion could hardly have been possible. When St. Paul and Silas had been cast into prison at Philippi, they converted the jailer and his family, and at once baptized them (*Acts,* XVI, 33). Now, it is unbelievable that within the confines of a prison of nineteen centuries ago there could have been a receptacle sufficiently large for Baptism by immersion.

The passage from *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* which we quoted above, with its admonition to baptize by *pouring* when there is not a sufficient quantity of water for immersion, shows that even at the beginning of the second century, when the apostolic teachings and practices were still fresh in the minds of Christians, infusion was held to be a valid method of baptizing. The same doctrine is frequently stated in the writings of the centuries that followed. Immersion seems to have been the ordinary method, it is true, yet pouring was also in use, particularly in the case of the sick. In fact, in some places—judging from ancient pictures—the usual manner of baptizing those in good health seems to have been a combination of immersion and infusion. The candidate entered the water up to his waist, and then the priest poured water over his head. In view of all these weighty scriptural and historical arguments, it is surely unreasonable to hold

that Christ established total immersion as the only valid way of baptizing.

Nowadays, in the Catholic Church both immersion and infusion are used, the former being the usual method among Oriental Catholics, the latter the ordinary method among Catholics of the Latin rite. The Code of Canon Law prescribes: "Although Baptism can be validly conferred either by infusion or by immersion or by aspersion, the first or second method, or a combination of both, whichever is more in use, shall be retained, according to the approved ritual books of the different churches" (Canon 758). From this prescription it can be seen that aspersion is not ordinarily to be used. The reason is that there is danger that the water may not touch the person's head or may not flow. However, if these conditions are fulfilled, aspersion is valid, and if circumstances permit this method only, it should be employed in case of necessity.

The exact conditions necessary for the baptismal ablution, or proximate matter of this sacrament, can be summarized as follows: (1) The water must touch the *head*—that is, either the crown or the brow—of the person to be baptized. For the human soul functions principally in the head. There is some *probability* however that a person could be validly baptized on some other part of the body, especially the breast; and when the head of a dying person in need of Baptism cannot be reached—for example, when he is pinned down by wreckage—another part of the body should be given the sacramental ablution with the conditional intention, "if this is a valid mode of Baptism." Subsequently the Baptism should be repeated on the head, if the opportunity is given, conditionally on the non-validity of the previous Baptism. (2) The water must touch the *skin;* for there must be an ablution of the *body*. If it touched only the person's cap or a wig, the sacrament would surely not be conferred. If the water reached only the hair, the Baptism would be doubtful. (3) The water must *flow;* otherwise the idea of a *washing* is not fully

realized. There would be grave reason to doubt the validity of the sacramental rite if the minister merely anointed the brow of the person to be baptized with his finger moistened with water.* (4) The person administering the sacrament must physically perform the act of ablution. There would be no Baptism if he simply said the required words while the person to be baptized immersed himself or poured water on himself. The minister must personally pour or sprinkle the water, or push the person to be baptized under water and draw him up again, or place his head under running water.

When a priest baptizes, he pours the water (or immerses the candidate) *three times,* in honor of the three divine Persons and also in commemoration of the three days spent by our Saviour in the tomb. However, one infusion (or immersion) is enough for *validity.* When a lay person gives the sacrament it is better for him to pour the water only once, and that during the entire time he is pronouncing the words.

The form of Baptism, according to the Latin rite, is: *"N - - - - I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."* This formula is derived from Christ's command to the apostles to teach all nations, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (*Matthew,* XXVIII, 19). That the same form which we have today was in use in the early Church is asserted or implied in *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* and in the writings of St. Justin dating from the second century, and in the *Acts of Claudius Romanus* which have come down from the third century. In fact, it is commonly held by Catholic scholars that the substance of the form of Baptism as we have it—that is, expressing the act of baptizing, the person being baptized and the three divine Persons in the unity of the divine nature —was prescribed definitely by Christ Himself, so that even

* This is the method employed by some Protestant ministers.

the Church could not order a change of this form.

It is true, in some passages of the New Testament* mention is made of the conferring of Baptism *in the name of Jesus Christ*. Some Catholic scholars have concluded from this that in the primitive Church the form of this sacrament was "I baptize thee in the name of Jesus Christ," instead of "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, etc." They say that there was a temporary dispensation given by God from the ordinary form in order that the name of His divine Son might be better known and more glorified. But the better interpretation of this expression "to give Baptism in the name of Christ" is that the apostles used the same form that we now have in conferring the sacrament, but that they are said to have administered the rite of spiritual regeneration "in the name of Christ" inasmuch as they acted as His representatives and by His authority.

All the words of the prescribed form must be pronounced most exactly. Thus, if the minister were to say "in the *names* of the Father, etc.," instead of "in the *name,* etc.," there would be reason to doubt the validity of the Baptism. The use of the singular *name* implies that there is only one nature in God, and this is just as important an element of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as the truth that there are three divine Persons. Even if the *and* between *Son* and *Holy Ghost* were left out the sacrament would be doubtful, since the perfect distinction of these two Persons would not, in such a case, be fully expressed. The omission of *thee* would leave the validity of the Baptism questionable; and if *I baptize,* or its equivalent, were not pronounced the sacrament would surely not be conferred.

Among Christians of the Oriental rites the form is expressed thus—"The servant of God *N.* is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." As can be readily seen, this form is substantially the same as that of the Latin rite, the only difference being that

* For example, *Acts*, II, 38.

it is expressed passively, while the Latin form is put in the active mood.

The same person must perform the act of baptizing and pronounce the words. Thus, if one person poured the water and another said the words, the administration would most probably be invalid. If circumstances ever arose in which a dying infant could be baptized only in this manner* it could be employed because of the slight probability of its validity but the one pronouncing the words should say: *"We* baptize thee, etc." If possible, the sacrament should later be administered in a certain manner, conditionally on the non-validity of the previous administration.

The Ceremonies of Baptism

The Church has enhanced the administration of Baptism with a wealth of impressive and significant ceremonies. They are not essential for the validity of the sacrament, which is always given if the matter and the form described above are present. However, the Church wishes these ceremonies to be performed over every one admitted among her members, and when a child in danger of death has been baptized privately with the mere essentials, the ceremonies are to be supplied later in the church if the child survives.

There are two forms of ceremonies employed by the Church—one is used in the Baptism of infants (all who have not reached the age of reason) and the other is used in the Baptism of all who have attained to the use of reason. The order of ceremonies for infant Baptism is as follows:

First, the priest asks the child what he is seeking of the Church of God, and the answer—given by the godparents—is: "Faith." Then come the question and answer: "What doth faith bring thee to?"—"Life everlasting." The priest

* A case could be imagined in which only a deaf mute and a person whose arms were amputated were present.

then exhorts the child ever to observe the commandments, especially the great commandment to love God, prays over him, makes the sign of the cross on his forehead and heart, and places in his mouth a pinch of blessed salt—a symbol of the heavenly wisdom which the Christian should manifest and also, by its preservative qualities, a reminder to preserve sanctifying grace until death. Next the priest recites more prayers for the child's spiritual welfare, and delivers a stern admonition to the devil to depart from the soul which is soon to be purified from original sin and consecrated to the service of Jesus Christ.

Then the priest with his stole conducts the child to the font, where the godparents in the name of the little one recite the Apostles' Creed and the Our Father. Another exorcism against the power of the devil is delivered and then the priest moistens his thumb with spittle and touches the child's ears saying "Ephpheta, which is, be thou opened" —an exhortation to be ever ready to listen to Christian teaching.* In the same manner the priest touches the child's nostrils, saying: "Unto an odor of sweetness" signifying that the sweet odor of virtue should pervade the life of the baptized person. He then questions the child regarding his willingness to renounce Satan and his works and pomps, and when the affirmative answer is given by the godparents, he anoints the child on the breast and between the shoulders with the oil of catechumens. This symbolizes that the Christian must struggle against temptation, and accordingly is anointed for the fray as the athletes of old were anointed before they entered the arena. Then the priest questions the child as to his belief in the principal truths of the Christian revelation and as to his wish to be baptized. When the suitable replies have been given by the sponsors the sacrament of Baptism is administered.

Afterward the priest anoints the head of the newly baptized infant with chrism, the holy oil symbolizing the

* This ceremony is based on the actions of our Lord when He cured a deaf mute (*Mark*, VII, 34).

intimate union he now possesses with Christ. Over the child he places for a moment a white cloth, as a sign of the beautiful garment of sanctifying grace with which the little one is now clothed. Finally he gives the child (through the hands of the godparents) a lighted candle with the exhortation to lead an unblemished Christian life so as ever to be prepared to meet our Lord, as kings are met with lighted torches.

The form of ceremonies for the Baptism of adults is somewhat longer, and the candidate himself answers the questions, recites the Creed, etc. However, this formula is not very often used, for the authorities of the Church generally allow the use of the same ceremonies in the Baptism of adults as in that of children, the person to be baptized replying with the sponsors.

By the law of the Church a person must have at least one godparent, or sponsor, in Baptism. Two sponsors at most are permitted, but they should be of opposite sexes. Usually in the United States, at least for the Baptism of infants, there are two godparents. A sponsor must be a baptized Catholic possessing the use of reason and designated to act as sponsor by the child's parents or guardians* (or, if they designate no one, by the priest). A godparent must touch the child physically during the actual Baptism or receive him immediately from the one who administers the sacrament; however, this can be done by an authorized representative or proxy. A child's parent cannot be its godparent nor can a husband be sponsor at his wife's Baptism, or vice versa. To be a sponsor lawfully one must be at least thirteen years old,** and know the essentials of the Catholic faith. A religious may not act as sponsor without the consent of his superior, nor a cleric in higher orders without the permission of his bishop. Moreover, certain grave ecclesiastical penalties render a

* An adult convert himself designates his sponsors.
** The minister may grant an exception to this law in certain circumstances.

person incapable of being a godparent in Baptism; and others, while not preventing him from acting as such *validly,* forbid him to do so *lawfully.*

A sponsor's chief duty is to see that the child whose godparent he has become is brought up in the knowledge and practice of the Catholic religion. Accordingly, the parents of a child about to be baptized should choose only good Catholics to be sponsors for their little one.* A sponsor contracts a spiritual relationship with the person baptized which is an impediment to marriage between them. Godparents do not contract such a relationship with each other.

THE EFFECTS AND THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

The Effects of Baptism

Our Lord established Baptism to incorporate the person to be baptized into His Church and to bestow on his soul a supernatural life. The former purpose is attained by the character of Baptism, the latter by the grace conferred by this sacrament. We shall consider these two effects separately.

Whenever Baptism is received *validly*—even though *unworthily,* as can happen in the case of an adult—there is impressed on the soul a spiritual mark known as a character. This mark is indelible; it endures not only during the present life but also for all eternity. Because of this character the sacrament of Baptism, once validly received, can never be received again.

This character makes the recipient a member of the Church of Christ, and accordingly renders him subject to the laws of the Church by the prescription of Christ Him-

* It seems hardly necessary to state that a non-Catholic cannot be a godparent at a Catholic Baptism.

self.* Now, since the Catholic Church alone is the true Church of Christ, she has the right to legislate in spiritual matters for all baptized persons, whether Catholic or non-Catholic. Doubtless this may seem to some an arrogant assumption on the part of the Church. Yet if Christ, the supreme Lord of mankind, gave authority over all persons baptized into the Church to the apostles and their successors, and if the successors of the apostles are the Pope and the bishops of the Catholic Church—as Catholics firmly believe—it follows logically that the Pope and the bishops have spiritual authority over all persons without exception who bear on their souls the baptismal character. Many of the laws of the Church are not, in fact, extended to non-Catholics. Some however are meant for all baptized persons, Protestants as well as Catholics, such as the law which renders invalid the marriage of first and second cousins.

The character of Baptism is a participation of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Hence, the lay Catholic in assisting at Mass is really cooperating actively with the priest in offering the holy sacrifice, though of course in a limited degree. Moreover, the character makes one capable of receiving the other sacraments, which cannot be received validly by an unbaptized person.

The other effect of Baptism—grace—is twofold, sanctifying grace and sacramental grace. Sanctifying grace is a sublime supernatural quality which is a participation of God's own nature, and makes the recipient pleasing to God and imparts to him a right to the eternal joys of heaven. Sacramental grace is the particular mode of grace given by each sacrament, and in Baptism it is a *spiritual regeneration* or *rebirth,* according to our Lord's own expression, "Unless a man be *born again,* etc." This means

* After incorporation in the Church by Baptism a person can separate himself from its membership by professing heretical beliefs or by pertinaciously refusing obedience to the lawful ecclesiastical superiors. Yet, even in such cases, the baptized person retains a link with the true Church because of his baptismal character, and hence his obligation to obey the laws of the church remains.

that, just as by his natural birth a person begins to live the natural life of the body, so by the grace of Baptism he begins to live a supernatural life—a life in union with Christ, as the adopted child of God, with the assurance of an everlasting life of happiness beyond the grave.

Together with the sacramental grace of Baptism is given a right to those actual graces that will be needed later on by the baptized person in order to live as a loyal follower of Christ. These graces will be given whenever necessary to the baptized person living in the state of grace. No good Christian, however severely he may be tempted by the world, the flesh and the devil, will ever be deprived of the divine help he requires to remain faithful to his duties as a child of God and a brother of Jesus Christ.

Those who receive Baptism after attaining to the age of reason are given a measure of grace proportionate to the fervor of their preparation for the sacrament. These persons also receive in Baptism the remission of all the temporal punishment due to actual sins previously committed. Thus, if a person is baptized on his deathbed, all the sins he has committed during his lifetime are forgiven—no matter how grievous and numerous they may have been—not only as regards their guilt and their eternal punishment, but also as regards their temporal punishment. Accordingly, if such a one dies without committing any more sins he is exempt from the punishments of purgatory, and is admitted at once to heaven. We are supposing that he received Baptism with the necessary dispositions of soul, which will be explained.

The Necessity of Baptism

It is an article of faith that Baptism is necessary for entrance into heaven. This doctrine was explicitly taught by Christ: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (*John*, III, 5). From earliest times this truth has been asserted by ecclesiastical writers as a fundamental Christian

doctrine. Tertullian wrote: "The precept is laid down that without Baptism salvation is attainable by no one" (*Baptism,* chapter 12). And St. Basil asserted: "If you have not passed through the water you will not be freed from the cruel tyranny of the devil" (*Homily on Baptism,* n. 2).

The reason for the necessity of Baptism is found in the fact that every one comes into the world with the guilt of original sin, which excludes the soul from the kingdom of heaven. Baptism is the sole ordinary means, instituted by Christ, for the removal of original sin.

Baptism began to be a necessary means for salvation on Pentecost Sunday, when the apostles commenced their task of preaching the gospel. It is generally believed, however, that Baptism did not become necessary on that day for the entire world, but only for Jerusalem, and that only as the doctrines of Christianity were sufficiently promulgated to reach other nations did the eternal salvation of those people become dependent on their receiving this sacrament. Until such time the means of sanctification usually conferred shortly after the birth of a child, and proper to each race—for example, circumcision among the Jews—retained its power to sanctify the little ones and to remit original sin.

Even now, however, there are two extraordinary means of sanctification and salvation which can at times supply some of the effects of the sacrament of Baptism, especially the remission of sin and the infusion of grace. These two means are known as the baptism of blood and the baptism of desire.

Baptism of blood is martyrdom endured for the faith of Christ or for some Christian virtue. Christ promised: "He that shall lose his life for me, shall find it" (*Matthew,* X, 39). Since our Lord made this promise without any qualification, the Catholic Church has always believed that even an unbaptized person who gives his earthly life for Christ—that is, for His faith or any other Christian virtue—shall find the supernatural life of grace and be admitted immediately to the eternal life of glory. One who has attained to the use of reason must have the intention of receiving

death unresistingly and out of loyalty to Christ. This could happen in the case of an adult who is convinced of the truth of the Catholic Church and is preparing for Baptism when called on to testify to his belief with the sacrifice of his life. An example of this is St. Emerentiana, a catechumen, who was slain by the enemies of Christianity in the third century, and whose feast is celebrated by the Church on January 23. In the case of an unbaptized infant, incapable of any act of his own will, it suffices that those who put him to death be actuated by a hatred of the Christian religion or of some Christian virtue; in which case the little one receives the baptism of blood and passes to the glory of heaven. We have a somewhat similar case in the Holy Innocents, who were slain by King Herod in his desire to kill the new born Saviour, and who are venerated as saints by the Church because they suffered death for Christ.

The baptism of desire is an act of divine charity or an act of perfect contrition. By an act of divine charity is meant love for God above all things because He is infinitely good in Himself. By an act of perfect contrition is meant sorrow for all one's sins—at least all mortal sins—because sin offends God Who is all good in Himself and worthy of love. That such an act will procure for a person the pardon of his sins and the infusion of grace is manifest from the words of Christ Himself: "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father. And I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (*John,* XIV, 21). It is important to note that this act must be directed to God as He is made known to man by *supernatural* revelation, and not merely as He is recognized through the works of nature; for the act is destined to put the soul in a state of *supernatural* union with God. Such an act procures sanctifying grace for a person in a state of sin, whether he be baptized or unbaptized, whenever he makes it, and not only—as some imagine—when he is in danger of death. An unbaptized person making an act of divine charity or of perfect contrition must have the intention of receiving Baptism; but such an inten-

tion is always contained implicitly in the general purpose (which true love of God includes) of fulfilling God's law in future. Accordingly, even one who has never heard of the sacrament of Baptism, or inculpably fails to receive it, can be justified by the baptism of desire.*

It suffices that one who knows of his obligation to receive Baptism, in making an act of divine charity or perfect contrition, should intend to be baptized *when he is bound to receive this sacrament* and not necessarily *as soon as possible.* Thus, an adult may be sufficiently instructed to receive Baptism, yet for some good reason may wish to defer it for several months; and in the meantime he can live in sanctifying grace by turning to God with an act of divine charity or of perfect contrition.

The baptism of blood and the baptism of desire confer sanctifying grace and remit original sin and actual mortal sins together with the debt of eternal punishment due to them. In addition, martyrdom in the case of one who has reached the age of reason condones the entire debt of temporal punishment due to actual sins, so that a martyr goes to heaven immediately.** This is not the case with the baptism of desire. Moreover, neither of these extraordinary means of justification gives the baptismal character or the special sacramental grace of Baptism. Even one who is dying for the faith must receive Baptism, if he has not been baptized, before death.

Unbaptized Infants

The doctrine of the necessity of Baptism involves a problem which at first sight seems to furnish a serious objection against the mercy and the justice of God—that is, the exclusion from heaven of infants who die without Baptism. Children who die with original sin on their souls can never be admitted to the kingdom of eternal bliss. This is a

* These same principles are applicable to a baptized person with reference to the sacrament of Penance.

** Even martyrdom will not confer the state of grace and salvation unless a person has at least imperfect contrition for his actual mortal sins.

doctrine of Catholic faith; and since the reception of the sacrament of Baptism is the only way in which an infant can be cleansed of original sin—apart from the exceptional case of martyrdom—we logically conclude that children who die unbaptized will be forever excluded from heaven.*

However, this doctrine if carefully examined is shown to be reasonable and in no wise opposed to the justice or mercy of God. In the next life the unbaptized child will enjoy for all eternity a purely natural happiness—a happiness that far surpasses all the joys that this life can provide. He is indeed deprived of the supernatural happiness of heaven; but this is a free gift of God to which no creature has a right before receiving sanctifying grace. Hence, God is not acting unjustly if He refuses it to unbaptized children. Christ has instituted a means of sanctification and salvation which is applicable to all—the sacrament of Baptism. If certain children die without having received this means, whether because of the fault of others or because of the laws of nature, God is not to blame. The unbaptized child will receive all that it has a right to receive—eternal happiness of the purely natural order.

Nevertheless it is an immeasurable blessing to be admitted to the supernatural possession of God; and hence, every effort should be made to baptize any child that is in danger of death. By the law of the Church Catholic parents and guardians are obliged to have the children under their care baptized as soon as possible after birth. According to some reliable theologians—for example, St. Alphonsus, Damen, Hervé—it is a mortal sin for Catholics to keep an infant without Baptism for more than two weeks, unless there be a very good reason for the delay. Other theologians—for example, Tanquerey—allow a somewhat longer delay.

* God can make exceptions to His own laws; and it is possible that *in certain cases* He may confer sanctifying grace on infants independently of Baptism—for example, in the case of a still-born child of very pious parents. But a Catholic could not hold that the Almighty makes any *general* exception in this matter, or has provided any other *ordinary* means for the salvation of infants save Baptism.

THE MINISTER AND THE RECIPIENT OF BAPTISM

The Minister

The *ordinary* minister of solemn Baptism—that is, Baptism conferred with all the prescribed ceremonies—is a priest or a bishop. Such has been the constant belief and practice of the Church from the early centuries. However, in certain circumstances a deacon may administer solemn Baptism as the *extraordinary* minister. Moreover, parents should bring their children for Baptism to their own parish church, to be baptized by one of the priests of the parish. If the parents wish an exception to this rule, they should ask permission from their pastor.

Baptism can always be *validly* conferred by any person, provided he has the intention of giving the sacrament and fulfills the essential conditions as regards matter and form. In case of necessity, when a priest cannot be had, any lay person may *lawfully* baptize. In the early centuries it was doubted by some whether a heretic or a pagan could administer Baptism; but now there is no longer any doubt about the competency of such a person.* For example, Protestant and Jewish doctors sometimes administer Baptism to the infants of Catholic parents, when these little ones are in grave danger of death. However, a Catholic should be selected to confer the sacrament when one can be found capable of doing so. A parent should not baptize his or her child when there is another Catholic present who can perform the ceremony properly.

No one can baptize himself, as we know from the tradition of the Church and from ecclesiastical decisions. If therefore an unbaptized person were dying alone the only means available for him to receive the pardon of his sins and the infusion of grace would be an act of love of God or of perfect contrition.

* In the old days some doubted whether a woman could baptize!

All Catholics should know precisely how to baptize, for any one may be called on suddenly to administer this sacrament to some person in danger of death. Briefly, the rule is this:—*Take ordinary water, pour it on the forehead of the person to be baptized in sufficient quantity to flow freely, and while pouring say distinctly and exactly the words: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."**

The Recipient

Any one who has not been previously baptized can receive Baptism *validly*. One who has reached the age of reason must have the intention of receiving the sacrament, and this is all that is necessary for a *valid* reception. It is sufficient if the intention was once made, even if it is not renewed at the time of the Baptism—as would be the case, for example, if a person who is preparing for Baptism were suddenly stricken unconscious in a serious accident. Such a person could be baptized by virtue of his previous intention. In certain circumstances a person who has never *explicitly* desired Baptism or affiliation with the Catholic Church could be baptized when in danger of death and unconscious, if he has led a good life according to the honest dictates of his conscience, inasmuch as he can be said to have had the *implicit* desire of Baptism in his fidelity to the laws of God as he understood them.

Children who have not yet attained to the use of reason,** although incapable of having the intention of receiving Baptism, can nevertheless be validly and fruitfully baptized. The majority of Protestants agree with Catholics on

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* When a lay person baptizes he should never have the intention of conferring the sacrament "only in case the child will not be baptized by the priest". Such an intention, depending as it does on a future condition, renders the sacrament null and void. In baptizing, one should intend to give the sacrament, without any such qualification.

** In the same category are included persons who have been mentally defective all their lives, so that they are intellectually on a lower grade than the average child of seven years.

this point, although there are some non-Catholics who hold that no one can be baptized until he has reached the age of reason and can decide for himself whether or not he wishes to receive this sacrament. But to refute this idea we have the words of Christ Himself, asserting that every one without exception must be baptized in order to enter into the kingdom of God. (*John,* III, 5.) Now, surely, our blessed Lord willed that little children who die before the age of reason shall be admitted to heaven; and since Baptism is a necessary means to this end, infants must be capable of receiving this sacrament and of partaking of its graces.

There are several passages in the New Testament which imply the Baptism of children by St. Paul. Thus, he baptized the jailer of Philippi with his family (*Acts,* XVI, 33), Lydia and her household (*Acts,* XVI, 15), and the household of Stephenas (*I Corinthians,* I, 16). It is hardly possible that there were not some small children in these several households. Moreover, from the first centuries it has been customary in the Church to baptize children, as we learn from such reliable authorities as St. Cyprian and St. Augustine. There was, it is true, in some places during the early centuries, a custom of deferring the reception of Baptism until persons were mature, so that they could appreciate more fully the benefits of the sacrament. However, even those who observed this custom held that children *could* be baptized, and actually did baptize children in danger of death.

Those who are baptized in childhood must obey the laws of the Church when they come to the age of reason. To the objection that it is unjust to impose obligations on children without awaiting their consent we reply with the universally acknowledged principle that parents can place their children in a condition that entails obligations provided that there are compensating benefits. Thus, by the very fact that parents bring forth a child in a particular country, the child is bound by the laws of that country when he grows up, whether he wishes or not. But there is

a compensation in the rights of citizenship which accompany these obligations. Similarly, when parents have their child baptized they make him a citizen of the kingdom of Christ, the Church, and whether he wills it or not he is bound by the laws of the Church when he comes to the use of reason. But there is ample compensation in the numerous privileges that membership in the Church imparts.

To receive Baptism not only *validly* but also *fruitfully*—that is, to receive not only the character but also the graces of this sacrament—one who has attained to the use of reason must make an act of faith professing his belief in the doctrines of Christianity. There are two revealed truths at least that such a person must certainly know explicitly in order to receive the grace of this sacrament—that God exists, and that He rewards the good and punishes the wicked. Probably the doctrines of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation must also be explicitly known. Of course, for admission to the Catholic Church under ordinary circumstances many more doctrines must be learned; and it is only when a person is on the point of death that a priest would baptize him with such a limited knowledge of the truths of Christianity.

Besides an act of faith, an act of contrition is necessary for the fruitful reception of Baptism on the part of one who has committed mortal sin.* Any kind of supernatural contrition, even though it is based merely on the fear of God's punishments, suffices. Every one possessing the use of reason, whether he has ever sinned mortally or not, must intend to lead a good Christian life to receive the graces of this sacrament.

One who has received Baptism *unworthily* because of defect of the required dispositions, but who nevertheless has received the sacrament *validly* because he had the necessary intention, can subsequently obtain the baptismal grace

* At Baptism a person receives the pardon of those venial sins for which he has contrition, but not of those for which he has no supernatural sorrow.

through the *revival* of the sacrament. He must supply the requisite dispositions—faith and contrition. As to the contrition, these are the general principles: If he committed any mortal sin subsequently to Baptism, or if he received this sacrament with consciousness of his unworthiness, these sins must be confessed and absolved in the sacrament of Penance. In addition he must have sorrow for his previous sins. But if he did not realize at the time the unworthiness of his reception of the sacrament and has not since committed any mortal sin, an act of imperfect contrition for all his transgressions previous to Baptism suffices for the revival of this sacrament. In any event the sins committed before Baptism are not confessed in the sacrament of Penance.

Conclusion

To receive Baptism and thus to be incorporated in the Church of Jesus Christ and enriched with the life of grace is a privilege that surpasses everything that this world can bestow. There are millions of persons on earth today who have not had the opportunity of receiving Baptism. Those who have read this pamphlet—the great majority of them at least—were baptized as infants. They should realize that their Baptism, though received in childhood, has lasting effects and will provide them until the end of their earthly lives with the graces they need to be fervent Christians. This thought should console and encourage them in trials and temptations. Above all, it should remind them of the grave obligations connected with Baptism, the obligations of which the priest spoke at the conclusion of the baptismal ceremony when he placed in their hands the lighted candle with the admonition: "Receive this burning light and keep thy Baptism so as to be without blame; observe the commandments of God, that when our Lord shall come to His nuptials, thou mayest meet Him together with all the saints in the heavenly court, and live for ever and ever. Amen".

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STUDY OUTLINE

Introduction

Jesus Christ instituted seven external rites, or outward signs, possessing the power to confer supernatural grace, in order to apply to the souls of men the fruits of His redemption and lead them to eternal happiness. These rites are called *sacraments*. The first and most necessary of the sacraments is Baptism, by which a person is regenerated to the life of grace and incorporated into Christ's Church. The name of this sacrament comes from the Greek word *βαπτίζειν*, which means *to wash*.

The History of Baptism

(a) It was fitting that Christ should establish some external ceremony by which men could acquire membership in His Church and receive the state of grace. Shortly after the beginning of His public ministry, Christ indicated that He intended to institute such a ceremony, referring to it as "a rebirth through water and the Holy Ghost" (*John*, III, 5). Most probably this rite was instituted and put into use before Christ's death. At any rate, He made explicit mention of it and emphasized its importance when, just before His Ascension, He commanded His apostles to preach the Gospel throughout the entire world and to *baptize* all men (*Matt.*, XXVIII, 19; *Mark*, XVI, 16).

(b) After the ascension of Christ the apostles began to administer the rite of Baptism to all converts to Christianity, as a necessary means of incorporation in the Church and of eternal salvation. (*Acts*, II, 38, 41; VIII, 12, 26-39; IX, 18; X, 47). Following the example of the apostles, the Catholic Church has always held Baptism to be a rite of supreme importance. From the beginning it has been recognized as a sacrament, instituted by Christ.

The Rite of Baptism

(a) Christ Himself determined the essential elements of Baptism. The remote matter is water—an appropriate symbol of the spiritual cleansing effected by this sacrament (*John*, III, 5; *Acts*, VIII, 36). In solemn Baptism water specially consecrated is used. For the *validity* of the sacrament any kind of true water is sufficient.

The proximate matter of Baptism is the washing of the body of the person to be baptized. This can be done either by pouring or by sprinkling, as well as by complete immersion, as is implied in Sacred Scripture and proved with certainty from tradition. However, the person baptizing must perform the ablution so that the water flows at least over the skin of the head of the recipient.

The form of Baptism, pronounced by the minister while performing the ablution, is: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

(b) To increase the dignity of Baptism, the Church has added a number of ceremonies for the solemn administration of this sacrament, such as exorcisms and anointings. Moreover, on receiving Baptism a person has at least one sponsor, or godparent. The chief duty of a godparent is to see that the baptized person receives a proper Catholic training.

The Effects and Necessity of Baptism

(a) The chief effects of Baptism are an indelible character and supernatural grace. The character incorporates the recipient into the visible Church of Christ, the Catholic Church, to whose laws he thus becomes permanently subject. This character is a participation of Christ's priesthood. The supernatural grace of Baptism is twofold—sanctifying and sacramental. The sacramental grace is a spiritual rebirth of the soul, bringing with it a right to those actual graces which the baptized person may need to live as a good Christian. The sacramental grace of Baptism also condones the entire debt of punishment due to sin.

(b) By Christ's will Baptism is necessary for the salvation of every human being (*John*, III, 5). Baptism is the only ordinary means of cleansing the soul from original sin. This necessity of Baptism began on Pentecost Sunday, and with the spread of the Gospel was extended gradually to the entire human race. However, under certain circumstances martyrdom (the baptism of blood) and divine love or perfect contrition (the baptism of desire) will supply the most important effects of the sacrament and procure salvation.

(c) Since original sin excludes the soul from heaven, infants who die unbaptized will never be admitted to the vision of God in heaven. This is not opposed to God's justice, since these infants have no right to *supernatural* happiness. However, most probably they will enjoy a high degree of *natural* happiness, and be free from suffering, for all eternity.

The Minister and the Recipient of Baptism

(a) The ordinary minister of *solemn* Baptism is a bishop or priest. A deacon may be the extraordinary minister. This sacrament can be *validly* conferred by anyone possessing the use of reason. In case of necessity, when an ordained minister cannot be had, a lay person may and should baptize. Every Catholic should know how to administer Baptism. No one can baptize himself.

(b) Any unbaptized person can *validly* receive Baptism. One who has reached the age of reason must have at least an implicit intention of receiving the sacrament. Children who have not reached the age of reason can be validly and fruitfully baptized, as is evident from the constant teaching and practice of the Church. Christ made Baptism a necessary means of salvation, and undoubtedly He wills the salvation of children who die before coming to the use of reason. Even those baptized as infants must obey the laws of the Church when they reach the age of reason. To receive Baptism fruitfully, one who has the use of reason must believe the doctrines of Christianity and have contrition for his mortal sins. One who has received this sacrament unworthily can gain its graces later if he supplies the necessary dispositions.

Conclusion

It is a precious privilege to receive Baptism, and those who have received this sacrament should show their gratitude to God by living up to the obligations it entails.

Confirmation

By
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CONFIRMATION

BY REV. FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

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Introduction

THERE is a striking parallel between the natural life of man's body and the supernatural life of his soul. Thus, corresponding to birth in the natural order there is in the supernatural order the sacrament of Baptism through which, the soul is born to the life of grace through the instrumentality of water and the power of the Holy Ghost. In the natural order the body is nourished by material food. In the supernatural order the soul is nourished by the spiritual food of the Holy Eucharist. To heal bodily sickness we take natural remedies; to heal the sickness of the soul, sin, we have the supernatural remedy of Penance.

With such a close and detailed resemblance between the natural and the supernatural before our eyes, we should not be unreasonable in trying to find in the supernatural sphere some means of attaining to a perfection of spiritual vigor corresponding to the fulness of bodily strength a man normally acquires with maturity. This means of supernatural growth, according to the teaching of the Catholic Church, has been provided by our Saviour in the sacrament of Confirmation. This is the sacrament by which we receive the Holy Ghost to make us strong and perfect Christians, ready to defend and to teach the faith of Jesus Christ.

Many Catholics do not realize the importance of Confirmation. Having received this sacrament in their childhood, they are apt to regard it merely as a ceremony which took place in the past and no longer serves as a source of spiritual vitality. It really is a medium of divine omnipotence which, although it can be received only once, is capable of procuring precious graces for those who have been confirmed as long as they live. Since, therefore, Confirmation plays so important a part in the spiritual development and activities of every one who has received it, it is important that all Catholics know the teachings of their Church concerning this sacrament. To give this information in a simple and concise form is the object of this pamphlet.

CONFIRMATION

BY REVEREND FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

THE HISTORY OF CONFIRMATION

Origin of Confirmation

The eighth chapter of the inspired book known as *The Acts of the Apostles*—the fifth book in the New Testament, written by the Evangelist St. Luke—relates that the deacon Philip went down from Jerusalem to Samaria to preach Christianity to the inhabitants of that region. Moved by the persuasive power of the Gospel and by the wondrous miracles wrought by Philip in testimony of the divine origin of his teachings, many of the Samaritans embraced the religion of Jesus Christ and received Baptism from the hands of Philip. Then, the inspired writer continues: "When the apostles who were in Jerusalem had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Who, when they were come, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost. For He was not as yet come upon any of them; but they were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost" (*Acts*, VIII, 14-17).

Evidently the ceremony here described was a rite of great importance, since the ministry of the apostles was required for its performance. A study of the scriptural narrative shows that this rite was made up of two external elements—prayer and the laying on of hands. The effect of this ceremony was

the giving of the Holy Ghost, which in the words of the New Testament signifies the conferring of supernatural grace. In other words, the ceremony so minutely described by St. Luke possessed the essential elements of a sacrament—an external sign having the power to give grace.

Another passage in *The Acts of the Apostles,* relating the missionary activities of St. Paul at Ephesus, states that this same sacramental rite was conferred there by the Apostle on the converts to Christianity. "They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had imposed his hands on them, the Holy Ghost came upon them" (*Acts,* XIX, 5-6).

From these two passages it is evident that this ceremony of prayer and the imposing of hands for the purpose of imparting the grace of the Holy Ghost was a normal feature of the initiation into the fulness of the Christian life of all who had been admitted to the Church by Baptism.

It is a dogma of the Catholic faith, solemnly defined by the Council of Trent, and based on a constant tradition of the Church, that our Saviour instituted all the sacraments of the New Law. Accordingly, since the rite described in *The Acts of the Apostles* was a sacrament, it must have been established by Christ. The Bible does not indeed explicitly assert the institution of this ceremony by our Lord, as it does of Baptism, Penance and the Holy Eucharist. But this will not surprise us when we consider St. John's statement that many of the things done by Jesus were not committed to writing (*John,* XX, 30; XXI, 25). However, on several occasions, and particularly immediately after the Last Supper, Christ promised to send the Holy Ghost to console and strengthen those who would believe in Him. Undoubtedly the ceremony of the laying on of hands performed by the apostles was established by their Master in fulfilment of this promise before His ascension into heaven. Because of the intimate bearing of the promise made after the Last Supper on the rite for conferring the Holy Ghost many theologians assign

that occasion as the time when this sacrament was instituted. Others believe it was instituted in the course of the forty days that intervened between Christ's resurrection and His ascension. During this time our Lord frequently appeared to the apostles and spoke to them of the kingdom of God (*Acts*, I, 3). Some of the older theologians believed that Christ established this rite when He laid His hands in blessing on the heads of little children (*Mark*, X, 16). This last view is now regarded as improbable, and the most we can say is that on this occasion our Lord prefigured the sacrament which we are now discussing.

At any rate, this sacrament—the sacrament which we now call Confirmation—had been given by our Saviour to His Church as a permanent rite of sanctification for the faithful before He ascended into heaven to take His place of glory at the right hand of His Father.

Confirmation in the Early Church

The writings of the Fathers who lived in the early centuries of the Christian era furnish abundant proofs that the ceremony which the apostles performed by the imposing of hands continued to be used in the Church, and was recognized as one of the external means of grace instituted by Christ. Thus, Tertullian, who was a priest in Carthage about the year 200, wrote: "Then (after Baptism) the hand is laid upon us through the blessing, calling upon and inviting the Holy Ghost" (*On Baptism*, Chap. 8). About the year 250 St. Cyprian, after describing the ceremony performed by the apostles for the Christians of Samaria, went on to say: "This also is now done among us; so that they who are baptized in the Church are presented to the bishops of the Church, and by our prayer* and the imposition of hands receive the Holy Ghost and are perfected by the seal of the Lord" (*Letter* 73,

* St. Cyprian was bishop of Carthage.

n. 9). St. Jerome, writing about the year 400, says that the bishop goes forth to those living outside the city who have been baptized by priests or deacons, in order that he may lay hands on them and call down the Holy Ghost (*Dialogue against the Luciferians,* n. 9). These are but a few of the numerous citations from the early writers that could be quoted to show the constant use of this rite in the Church and the important place assigned to it in ecclesiastical liturgy.

This sacrament has been known by various names in the course of the centuries. In the early period of the Church it was usually known as "the imposition of hands" or "consummation" or "perfection." The Latin *Confirmatio* has been used in the Western Church since the fifth century. In most modern languages the translation or the equivalent of this noun is nowadays used to designate the sacrament of spiritual strength. Thus we have the English *Confirmation,* the German *Firmung,* the Spanish *Confirmacion,* the Bohemian *Biřmování.* A few languages however take the name for this sacrament from the anointing with chrism which is one of its ceremonies—for example the Italian and the Greek, which designate Confirmation as *chresima* and *myron* respectively.

Attacks on Confirmation

Some of the heretical groups in Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as the Albigensians, the Waldensians and the Wyclifites, seem to have rejected Confirmation, although whether they all denied it is a sacrament or only refused to make use of it is uncertain.* But the Protestant sects that began to exist in the sixteenth century unequivocally and unanimously repudiated Confirmation as a sacrament of divine institution, although some of them continued to use it as a ceremony of purely ecclesiastical

* Our knowledge of the teachings of these heretics regarding Confirmation is very meagre, and the sources from which it is drawn are not wholly reliable.

origin. Luther traced the beginning of Confirmation to the catechetical examination which the bishops conducted for children when they had reached the age of twelve or fourteen years. In order to invest this examination with a measure of solemnity, Luther said, the bishops imposed their hands on the heads of the children who had shown sufficient knowledge of Christian doctrine; and in the course of time this rite began to be regarded as a sacrament. This theory of Luther is proved to be entirely devoid of historical value by numerous passages from early Christian writings such as those cited previously, which show that Confirmation was always regarded as a divinely established rite.

The twenty-fifth of the Thirty-Nine Articles stating the doctrinal foundation of the Anglican and the Protestant Episcopal Churches declares that there are only two sacraments ordained by Christ in the Gospel—Baptism and the Eucharist. The other five in use in the Catholic Church are not to be accounted as sacraments of the Gospel. Notwithstanding this declaration, a considerable number of the members of these churches who are gradually adopting the doctrines and the liturgical practices of Catholicism—Anglo-Catholics, as they call themselves—nowadays regard Confirmation as a true sacrament.

The so-called "Modernists"* declare that Confirmation originated in this manner: In the early centuries an anointing with chrism and a laying on of hands by the priest or bishop constituted one of the accessory rites of solemn Bap-

* The basic contention of the Modernists is that the teachings of the Catholic Church cannot be reconciled with the knowledge which the scientific and historical studies of modern times have provided. Some Modernists, while claiming to be Christians, deny the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. About the beginning of the twentieth century even a few Catholic scholars were tainted with Modernism. This heresy—or rather, collection of heresies—was condemned by Pope Pius X in 1908.

tism. Eventually this rite was given the dignity and name of a separate sacrament.

However, the Modernistic explanation is convincingly refuted by the fact that from the earliest centuries Confirmation, though often conferred at the same time as Baptism, and sometimes named as a complement of Baptism, was always regarded as an essentially different sacrament. Thus, even in the first account of Confirmation, which we cited from the eighth chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles,* it is related the power to confirm was recognized as the exclusive right of the apostles. The deacon Philip, who had baptized the Samaritans, could not impose hands to give them the Holy Ghost. Now surely, if the laying on of hands for the giving of the Holy Ghost were only an accessory rite of Baptism, it could have been performed by the minister empowered to give Baptism itself.

The distinction between Baptism and Confirmation is emphasized in many passages from the writings of the early Fathers. In fact, recent historical researches conducted by competent scholars, far from supporting the views of the Protestants and the Modernists, corroborate the Catholic doctrine that Confirmation is a true sacrament, instituted by Christ as a rite distinct from Baptism, though ordained to strengthen and to perfect the grace imparted by the sacrament of spiritual regeneration. It is of importance in this connection to note that the heretical and schismatic churches of the East—such as the Nestorian, the Monophysite Coptic and the Greek Orthodox churches—agree with the Catholic Church in recognizing Confirmation as a sacrament, even though these churches separated themselves from Catholic unity many centuries ago. These separated Eastern Christians are extremely averse to all that is specifically Catholic. Since they pride themselves on their close adherence to the beliefs and the cult of primitive Christianity, their acknowledgment of the sacramental nature of Confirmation is a good argu-

ment that this rite was not brought into existence by the authority of the Catholic Church but was instituted by Christ Himself as a means of grace to be used by the faithful until the end of time.

THE CEREMONIES OF CONFIRMATION

The Rite of Confirmation at the Present Day

When a bishop of the Latin rite administers the sacrament of Confirmation, he usually begins the function with a sermon to those who are to be confirmed, explaining the nature and the effects of the sacrament, and exhorting them to receive it devoutly. Sometimes the bishop questions children about to be confirmed on matters of Christian doctrine. The sermon and the examination are not a part of the sacramental rite. This begins when the bishop, vested in cope and mitre, extends his hands over the candidates and recites a prayer petitioning that they may receive in abundance the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, which he explictly enumerates —wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. Then the bishop is seated on a chair placed on the altar-platform.* As each one kneels before him, he lays his right hand on the recipient's head, and with his thumb, which has been dipped in chrism, he makes the sign of the cross on the person's brow, saying: "I sign thee with the sign of the cross, and I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." Then the bishop gives the person a slight blow on the cheek, saying: "Peace be to thee." After this ceremony has been performed on all, the bishop stands on the platform of the altar and together with the assisting priests recites a formula of prayers. Then he gives

* When there are many to be confirmed the bishop sometimes administers the sacrament while passing along the altar-rail.

his blessing. Finally he commands those who have been confirmed to recite in unison the *Apostles' Creed,* the *Our Father* and the *Hail Mary.*

Theologians formerly disagreed as to which portions of this ceremony are essential for the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation. It was always admitted that the rites following the anointing with chrism—that is, the blow on the cheek, the prayers and the bishop's blessing—are not essential but are merely accessory ceremonies, prescribed by the Church to add to the dignity of the sacrament. It was also held by practically all theologians that the anointing of the brow with chrism—the chrismation, as it is called—is essential. The disputed point was, whether the extending of the bishop's hands and the accompanying prayer at the beginning of the function are also necessary for the valid administration of the sacrament. Nowadays from several pronouncements of the Holy See we can be certain that this feature of the rite, though important, is not essential. The only ceremony that is absolutely necessary is the anointing with chrism with the words: "I sign thee, etc."

In anointing with chrism the bishop really performs two different external actions—that is, he lays his hand on the candidate's head and anoints him with the sacred chrism. Most probably both actions are necessary for the validity of the sacrament, at least in the Latin rite. Accordingly, if the bishop used a brush to apply the chrism* the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation would be very doubtful, since there would be no imposition of his hand.

In theological language, the remote matter of Confirmation is the chrism, the proximate matter is the imposition of the bishop's hand with the anointing. The form is the words: "I sign thee, etc."

In the administration of Confirmation according to the

* This manner of anointing would be valid for Extreme Unction.

Eastern rites, there is no extension of hands by the bishop (or priest) over those to be confirmed, but only the anointing. Moreover, not only the forehead but also the eyes, the ears, the nose, the mouth, the breast, the hands and the feet are anointed. While giving the anointings the minister says: "The seal of the gift of the Holy Ghost". The words "is given to thee" are understood.

The Rite of Confirmation in the Early Church

In describing the administration of Confirmation as it was conferred by the apostles the passages of the *Acts of the Apostles* which we quoted above speak only of prayer and the imposition of hands, and make no mention of an anointing with oil. Some have believed that there is reference to an anointing as a constituent element of Confirmation in the words of St. Paul: "Now he that confirmeth us with you in Christ and that hath anointed us, is God" (*II Corinthians*, I, 21). However, according to others, the apostle is here referring to the interior confirmation and the metaphorical anointing of the spirit that are effected by sanctifying grace, rather than to an external rite.

In the theological writings of the early Christian centuries the rite of Confirmation is consistently described as a laying on of hands. There are no absolutely certain references to any anointing with chrism as an element of this sacrament. Some of the ancient writers do indeed mention an anointing after Baptism, but it is uncertain whether they are referring to Confirmation or to one of the baptismal ceremonies. It is only in the writings of the fourth century that we first discover certain evidence of the ceremony of anointing with chrism as one of the constituents of Confirmation. From that time on it was regularly mentioned in the accounts of the administration of this sacrament.

The question naturally arises how the silence of the early

writers concerning the ceremony of anointing as a component of Confirmation can be made to agree with the fact that nowadays the anointing with chrism is an essential element of this sacrament. Some theologians answer that the mere fact that the ancient writings make no mention—or, at most, only doubtful mention—of anointing is no argument it was not employed. Indeed, they claim, it must have been in use, for since Christ instituted all the sacraments, whatever is essential to a sacrament today must have always been essential.

Other theologians believe that a substantial change has taken place in the ceremony of Confirmation since apostolic times. For, they assert, the doctrine that Christ instituted the sacraments does not necessarily mean that He decided upon the exact external rite by which they were to be conferred. He could institute a sacrament by merely indicating to the apostles the specific purpose that was to be realized by this external means of grace, while leaving to them and to their successors in the government of the Church the right to choose any appropriate ceremony, and also the right to adopt a substantially different ceremony when they deemed it advisable to do so. The theologians of this school believe that our Lord actually did institute some of the sacraments, including Confirmation, in this generic manner. In other words, Christ prescribed that there should be in the Church a sacrament for the imparting of spiritual strength to the baptized, but authorized the rulers of the Church to select the precise kind of rite by which it would be administered. In virtue of this authorization the early Church employed only the imposition of hands as the essential matter of Confirmation. After several centuries the anointing with chrism was introduced as a necessary element.

Undoubtedly, this second solution is better adapted to solve the historical problems connected with the rite of Confirmation. Those who hold this view say that the anointing has

been *added* to the imposition of hands, rather than *substituted* for it—at least in the Latin rite*—since, as was stated above, the chrismation includes both an anointing and an imposition of the bishop's hand.

Chrism

Chrism is a mixture of olive-oil and balsam (or balm), blessed by a bishop. No other species of oil, whether vegetable or mineral, save that derived from olives suffices for the valid administration of Confirmation. Balsam is, strictly speaking, a resinous product of the terebinth, or turpentine tree. Such is the balsam of the Orient. According to a declaration of Pope Benedict XIV, in regions where this tree does not grow, any other fragrant sap or liquid which is commonly accepted as balsam can be used.

To constitute valid matter for Confirmation, the chrism must be blessed; and ordinarily, at least, the blessing must be performed by a bishop. Theologians discuss the question whether a priest could be delegated by the Pope to bless chrism. Although it seems quite probable that such a power could be delegated, there seems to be no case on record in which it was actually done.** The blessing of the chrism and of the other two sacred oils—the oil of the sick and the oil of catechumens—takes place annually on Holy Thursday at the Mass celebrated by the bishop in his cathedral. The ceremony of the blessing is very impressive, and when per-

* We say "at least in the Latin rite," for the Oriental Christians, both Catholic and non-Catholic, regard the present-day ceremony of Confirmation as exclusively an act of anointing, not as an imposition of the minister's hand. However, this offers no difficulty to the second group of theologians, since in their opinion the Church can determine one kind of ceremony for those who observe one liturgical rite and another kind for those who observe another rite.

** I have seen the statement that Father John Carroll, as Prefect-Apostolic of the United States—that is, before he became a bishop—was empowered by the Holy See to bless the sacred oils for the administration of the sacraments. However, an outstanding historian has informed me that this statement is not supported by any documentary evidence.—Author.

formed with full solemnity calls for the services of twelve priests, seven deacons and seven subdeacons. For the making of chrism the oil and the balsam are blessed separately, and are then mixed by the bishop.

By a strict law of the Church the bishop is obliged to use for Confirmation chrism blessed on the preceding Holy Thursday. However, even though chrism blessed on a previous occasion were employed, the sacrament would be valid. In case of urgent necessity, if the proper chrism is not available, the bishop may use chrism left over from a former year. Ordinarily, as soon as the blessing on Holy Thursday has been completed, the bishop's oils of the preceding year are burned.

In churches of the Oriental rites, not only chrism but also many other fragrant unguents and perfumes are mixed with the olive oil to form the sacred chrism.

Godparents

A person has a sponsor, or godparent, for Confirmation as for Baptism. Only one godparent is allowed to the recipient of Confirmation, and that godparent should be of the same sex as the person confirmed—unless the minister of the sacrament, for a good reason, permits a godparent of the opposite sex. It is the wish of the Church that the same person should not be sponsor to more than two candidates for Confirmation on the same occasion. However, circumstances sometimes render this point difficult of observance, and in some parishes it is customary on the occasion of Confirmation for one man to be godfather to all the boys and men, and one woman to be godmother to all the girls and women.

Like the godparents at Baptism, those who are sponsors at Confirmation are obliged to provide for the religious training of their spiritual children if those who have this duty normally are unable or unwilling to do so. Hence, only good Catholic men and women should be selected as godparents.

To act as godparent at Confirmation a person should be at

least fourteen years of age, and should himself or herself have received Confirmation. The Church law does not permit one who is a parent, husband or wife of the recipient to act as godparent. Under ordinary circumstances, one may not have the same godparent for Confirmation that he had at Baptism. The godparent touches the recipient during the actual administration of the sacrament—usually, by placing his or her hand on the candidate's shoulder.

Before the Code of Canon Law went into force on May 19, 1918, a person could not validly marry one who had been his or her godparent at Confirmation. However, since that time, the only spiritual relationship that prevents marriage is that which arises from Baptism.

Symbolism of the Rites of Confirmation

The ceremonies of Confirmation chiefly symbolize the spiritual strength necessary to profess and to defend the faith before the world, which is imparted to those who receive this sacrament with the proper dispositions. This idea is stressed in the prayers which the bishop recites before and after the actual administration of the sacrament, and in which he petitions for the recipients an abundance of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. By these gifts the intellect is enlightened to understand the truths of faith, and the will is strengthened to put them into practice. The imposition of the bishop's hand signifies the transmission of supernatural vigor. The oil of the chrism is symbolic of the rich graces which Confirmation imparts to the soul. The sweet-smelling balsam is a reminder of the fragrance of the Christian virtues which one who has been confirmed is expected to practice. The anointing with olive oil is also commemorative of the bodily anointing which was given athletes in ancient times before their contests in the arena. The Christian, after Confirmation, must be ready to engage vigorously in combat with the relentless foes of human salvation—the world, the flesh and the

devil. The chrism is applied in the form of a cross, which enables the followers of our Lord to triumph over every obstacle in the journey of life. The sign of the cross is made on the forehead, to imply that the perfect Christian must never be ashamed to acknowledge publicly his faith in Jesus Christ.

There are two opinions as to the meaning of the blow on the cheek. Some hold that this ceremony was borrowed from the medieval accolade—the rite by which a soldier was raised by his king to the rank of knight. In performing this rite the king lightly struck the candidate on the shoulder with a sword, to signify that a valiant knight must be prepared to endure blows in defence of the honor of his sovereign. According to this explanation, the blow given by the bishop at Confirmation implies that one who has received this sacrament must be willing to suffer hardships and persecutions bravely in the cause of Christ.

Other Catholic scholars believe, however, the blow on the cheek is a survival of the kiss of peace, which was a common ceremony in the gatherings and religious functions of the early Christians. Thus, St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, instructs them: "Salute one another with a holy kiss" (*Romans,* XVI, 16). This second explanation seems to harmonize better with the words spoken by the bishop when he performs this part of the ceremony: "Peace be to thee."

THE EFFECTS OF CONFIRMATION

Two effects are produced by the sacrament of Confirmation in the soul of the recipient—a spiritual character and supernatural grace. We shall discuss these separately, and then consider some practical points connected with the grace of this sacrament.

The Character of Confirmation

It is an article of Catholic faith, solemnly defined by the Council of Trent in 1547, that each of the three sacraments,

Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders, imprints on the soul of the recipient an indelible spiritual mark, known as a character. It must not be imagined that it was only in the sixteenth century, when this truth had been solemnly propounded, that Catholics began to believe it. Even from the early centuries the Church accepted the doctrine of the character of Confirmation. At first, it is true, the ideas entertained as to the nature of the character were very vague. Yet, it was acknowledged that Confirmation produces in the soul an effect which is distinct from grace and cannot be erased. This belief was expressed by the practice, which prevailed from the first days of the Church, of not repeating Confirmation once it had been validly given. The earliest writers described the character as "the seal of the Lord." The name "character" for this special effect seems to have originated with St. Augustine, who applied it to the spiritual mark given by Baptism. Later writers extended it to the indelible marks given by Confirmation and Holy Orders.

This character is a spiritual quality, and all who receive the sacrament validly—even though unworthily—obtain it in the same degree. Theologians do not agree as to whether the sacramental character resides in the essence of the soul, the will, or the intellect. St. Thomas argues that it is imprinted on the intellect, because its primary purpose is to depute the recipient to the cult of God, which is an external profession of faith, and therefore the character belongs in the same faculty as faith, that is, in the intellect. According to the most commonly accepted theological view, the permanence of the character is not limited to the present life. It is destined to remain on the soul for all eternity, to enhance its glory if it is saved, to add to its disgrace and punishment if it is lost.

The chief purpose of the sacramental character, as we just said, is to depute the recipients to the exercise of the cult of God. The special mode of cult to which the character of Con-

firmation appoints those who have received this sacrament is the public exposition and defence of the truths of Catholic faith. However, this statement must be understood correctly. Only the clergy—particularly the bishops—are empowered to teach, to explain and to defend the doctrines of Christian revelation officially. Nevertheless, one who has been confirmed is thereby authorized to undertake the task of explaining the truths of faith and of refuting attacks on the Catholic religion—but always with due obedience to the authority of the clergy. In the early days of Christianity it frequently happened that members of the laity, when brought to trial on the charge of being followers of Christ, argued so clearly and so convincingly for the truth of their religion that the pagan priests and philosophers were completely silenced. Those valiant Christian men and women were exercising a right given them by the character of Confirmation. Catholics of our own day sometimes have the opportunity to exercise the same right. Every educated Catholic nowadays should be sufficiently familiar with the teachings and the practices of his Church to refute the stock calumnies and misrepresentations directed against Catholicism. When a statement of this kind is made in his presence he should—ordinarily, at least—explain the Catholic side of the question courteously but unhesitatingly, for the character of Confirmation gives him the right and the duty to defend his faith before the world.

It is a common teaching of Catholic theology that the character of Confirmation gives the recipient a share in the priestly power and dignity of Jesus Christ—in a lesser degree than is conferred by the character of Holy Orders, but in a greater measure than is given by the character of Baptism. Every spiritual power that is given to a Christian is derived from the corresponding power existing in its fullness in Christ. Accordingly, the power which a lay Catholic possesses to explain and defend the faith—that is, the power conferred by the character of Confirmation—must be derived from that

power by virtue of which our Redeemer preached and explained the truths of divine revelation. It was by virtue of His priesthood that Christ expounded the revelation He had received from His Father—His priesthood which came to Him as man through the union of His humanity with His divine personality.

Confirmation, although perfectly distinct from Baptism, is the complement of this sacrament, since it is intended to perfect the spiritual life to which one is born at the baptismal font. A person who has received only Baptism is to one who has also received Confirmation as a child to an adult. Some theologians have concluded from this that the character given by Confirmation merges with the character of Baptism, giving it increased power and beauty. The better view is that the two characters remain distinct on the soul.

The Grace of Confirmation

Every sacrament worthily received gives the recipient a twofold grace—sanctifying grace and sacramental grace. Sanctifying grace is a supernatural quality that gives the soul a participation in the nature of God Himself, and makes it holy and pleasing in the eyes of God. The sanctifying grace which Confirmation is primarily intended to impart is called second grace—that is, an increase of grace in a soul already in possession of this divine quality. Confirmation is one of those sacraments—called sacraments of the living—which were meant by our Lord for those already living the supernatural life of grace. Accordingly, a person who would knowingly and wilfully receive Confirmation in the state of mortal sin would deliberately frustrate the designs of Christ and would be guilty of a grave sacrilege. He would receive no grace, but since he had the intention of receiving the sacrament, would really receive it, and the indelible character would be impressed on his soul.

It might happen that a person would receive Confirmation

in mortal sin, yet would not realize that he was doing something seriously wrong. For example, he might be so ignorant as not to know that he should be in the state of grace when being confirmed. Or he might know of this obligation, and sincerely think he is in the state of grace, while actually he is in the state of mortal sin.* At any rate, one who receives Confirmation under such conditions—that is, not knowing of the wrong he is doing—is not guilty of another sin in conscience, because God does not hold us accountable for an evil deed if, through no fault of ours, we are ignorant of its sinfulness. Theologians commonly teach that one who receives Confirmation in mortal sin without being conscious of wrong, obtains the state of grace from this sacrament provided he has attrition—that is, imperfect contrition—at the time. In other words, this sacrament in such circumstances has the power to forgive mortal sin under the same conditions it would be forgiven by a sacrament of the dead. Of course, sins forgiven in this way must be confessed later in the sacrament of Penance.

The special sacramental grace of Confirmation is spiritual strength, enabling the one who has received this sacrament to be fearless and constant in proclaiming and defending the faith. For, as the Church declared in the Council of Florence in 1439, Confirmation is given to us for the same purpose as the Holy Ghost was given to the apostles on Pentecost Sunday. The chief effect of the coming of the Holy Ghost on the apostles was to render them brave and resolute in the work of preaching the Gospel. Our Lord promised them solemnly before His ascension into heaven: "You shall receive the *power* of the Holy Ghost coming upon you; and you shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth" (*Acts*, I, 8). The apostles were by nature weak and timid.

* Such cases are, of course, very rare.

During the bitter hours of Christ's passion they abandoned Him through fear of the Jews. Even after He had proved His divinity by His resurrection from the dead, and had frequently appeared to them to strengthen and to encourage them, they gave no proof of any notable courage. But as soon as the Holy Ghost descended upon them, on the tenth day after Christ's ascension, they became new men. Afire with zeal for the glory of Christ and the spread of His religion, they went forth into the streets of Jerusalem, to preach the Gospel and to receive converts into the Church. A few years later, they separated to bring the light of truth into every quarter of the known world. Hardships and opposition, threats and imprisonment could not stop them from preaching the teachings of Christ to all men. Finally, as the supreme proof of their unwavering courage, they laid down their lives as martyrs for the Christian faith.

Nowadays few Catholics are called on to lay down their lives in testimony of loyalty to their religion. Yet, frequently the members of the Catholic Church are subjected to derision and social ostracism and subtle persecution because of their faith. Sometimes they are in circumstances where they are obliged in conscience to profess their faith at the risk of incurring great temporal losses. It is to provide supernatural courage and constancy to human nature, which naturally shrinks from what is irksome and unpleasant, that Confirmation has been given by our Saviour to the members of His Church.

It is sometimes stated that the special effect of Confirmation is the conferring of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. In fact, as we noted in the description of the administration of this sacrament, the bishop prays in the course of the ceremony that the gifts of the Holy Ghost may be abundantly given to those who are being confirmed. This does not mean that it is only at Confirmation one can receive the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. These precious gifts are always given with the in-

fusion of sanctifying grace into the soul, and in equal measure with this divine quality. Thus, the infant receives the seven gifts at Baptism, and when a baptized child comes to the age of reason and increases in sanctifying grace by receiving the sacraments and by performing meritorious actions, the seven gifts also increase in his soul in the same degree. But the *special* purpose of Confirmation is to enable the Christian to be strong and courageous in explaining and defending the faith and the necessary means to this end, the enlightening of the mind and the strengthening of the will, are precisely the functions of the seven gifts. So we can say that Confirmation, through its special sacramental grace is peculiarly adapted *to put into zealous operation* the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit—wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord.

The Sacrament of Catholic Action

The Catholic who lives according to the standards of his holy religion partakes of the effects of his Confirmation during his entire lifetime. There is joined to the special sacramental grace of this sacrament a claim to those actual helps of God which the recipient needs to be strong and courageous in the battle of life. Accordingly, Confirmation imparts supernatural help against all the foes of man's salvation, especially the insidious attacks of the world, which is implacably hostile to Christ and to His Church. In a word, Confirmation makes a person a truly militant Catholic.

Because of its efficacy in making the members of the Church zealous and ardent in the cause of religion, Confirmation is aptly called the Sacrament of Catholic Action. Pope Pius XI, in urging all Catholics to participate in Catholic Action, defined Catholic Action as the active co-operation of the laity with their clergy, and especially with their bishops, in promoting the spiritual aims of the Church. Confirmation, by empowering the recipients to explain and to defend their

faith, specially adapts them to take part in Catholic Action. Every Catholic who has received Confirmation should seek out some form of activity recommended by the Church authorities and suitable to his abilities and to his position in the world, by which he can perform some notable good for the Catholic cause.

The Revival of Confirmation

If a person has been so unfortunate as to receive Confirmation unworthily, is he deprived of the wonderful graces of this sacrament for the rest of his life? Clearly, he cannot receive Confirmation again, because of the indelible character imprinted on his soul. But, by the mercy of God he can obtain the graces that he once spurned. If he repents of his sins and returns to the friendship of God—the ordinary means of which is a worthy reception of the sacrament of Penance—the sacrament of Confirmation will revive. That is, with the return of sanctifying grace to his soul he also receives the graces that he would have obtained had he received Confirmation worthily.

One who has received Confirmation worthily but afterward falls into mortal sin loses together with sanctifying grace the right to the special helps of God which were annexed to the sacramental grace of Confirmation. However, when he returns to the state of grace this right is restored to him.

THE MINISTER AND THE RECIPIENT OF CONFIRMATION

The Minister

A bishop is the ordinary minister of the sacrament of Confirmation. When describing the administration of this sacrament in the early days of the Church, the New Testament relates that the apostles—the first bishops—were summoned to confer it. The writings of the Fathers who lived in the first centuries of the Christian era testify that the power to

confirm was always recognized as one of the distinctive rights of the bishops, the successors of the apostles in the fulness of the priestly ministry. Thus, St. Cyprian in the third century and St. John Chrysostom in the fourth century mention only bishops as the dispensers of Confirmation. Pope Innocent I, in the early part of the fifth century, in a decree concerning the "sealing of infants"—that is, Confirmations—says: "It is clear that it may not be done lawfully by any one but a bishop" (Letter 25). It seems most fitting that the sacrament which brings with it the perfect strength of spiritual maturity should be reserved to the ministry of those who possess the priesthood in its perfection.

Even though a bishop should leave the Catholic Church he would still retain the power to confirm, just as a priest who separates himself from Catholic unity still has the power to consecrate the Holy Eucharist. For this reason the bishops of the non-Catholic churches of the East can confirm validly. The same is not true however of the bishops of the Anglican and Protestant Episcopal Churches, because they have not received valid priestly and episcopal Orders.

Within his own diocese a bishop may lawfully confirm not only those who reside there but also persons from other dioceses. A bishop is allowed to confirm his own subjects even outside his own territory. But outside the borders of his diocese he may not confer this sacrament on other persons unless he has the permission of the local bishop. This permission can sometimes be reasonably presumed, when the bishop of the place cannot be reached. When administering this sacrament outside his own diocese a bishop does not use the pontifical insignia, the mitre and the crozier.

From a practice in the Church dating back at least as far as the fourth century it is evident that a priest can administer Confirmation if he has been delegated to this function by the Pope. Such a priest is said to be the extraordinary minister of this sacrament. Nowadays this power is sometimes given

to priests in mission countries, where there are few bishops. It is also given by the Pope, through a general delegation found in the Code of Canon Law, to those cardinals who are priests but not bishops, and to certain priests occupying important ecclesiastical positions, such as abbots and prefects apostolic.

In the churches of the Eastern rites, both Catholic and non-Catholic, it is customary for the priest who has baptized a child to administer Confirmation immediately afterward. This custom is known to the Pope, and since he permits it to go on, these priests confirm validly. We have a proof of the broadmindedness of the Holy See and of the desire of the Popes to benefit souls even outside the true Church in the fact that the power to confirm has never been withdrawn from non-Catholic Oriental priests since these churches severed themselves from Rome. Hence, these schismatic and heretical priests administer Confirmation validly to the members of their flock.

There are certain regions in which no Oriental priests, whether Catholic or non-Catholic, can confirm—for example, Italy, Cyprus, Albania and Bulgaria. In these lands only bishops can validly confirm.*

The Recipient

Any person who has been baptized and has not been confirmed can validly receive Confirmation. That Baptism must have been previously received follows from the general principle that this sacrament is the gateway to the Church, and is necessary before any other sacrament can be received validly. That *all* baptized persons can be confirmed is evident from Sacred Scripture and Tradition where this sacrament is proposed as a means of grace available to all the followers of Christ. Our Lord Himself promised that the Holy Ghost

* In recent years the priests of certain Greek Catholic dioceses in Italy have been empowered to administer Confirmation.

would be given to *every one* who would believe in Him (*John,* VII, 38-39), and it is especially through Confirmation that the Holy Ghost is given. We can also apply in this connection the parallelism between the natural and the supernatural orders. Everyone born into the world is destined by nature to come to maturity. So too, every one born into the supernatural order by Baptism is intended by our Saviour to come to the perfect maturity of the spiritual life which is provided by Confirmation.

In the Latin rite Confirmation is usually not given to children until they have reached the use of reason, when about seven years old. However, it is the wish of the Church that, unless there be good reasons to the contrary, children should not be kept too long from receiving Confirmation after they have reached this age. They need the powerful graces of this sacrament in the battle they must wage against the relentless foes of their salvation.

Among the Christians of the Eastern rites, and also in certain regions where the Latin rite is observed—for example, in Spain and in South America—it has been the custom for centuries for children to be confirmed immediately after Baptism, or at least before they reach the age of reason. The Holy See permits this custom to be retained, for these little ones receive the indelible character, an increase of sanctifying grace, and the sacramental grace which will produce its beneficial effects when they need them later in life. Moreover, even where it is the rule to defer Confirmation until the age of reason a child who is in danger of death may be confirmed. This same principle applies to those unfortunate persons who are mentally deficient from birth and will never attain to the use of their intellectual faculties. If they are confirmed they will receive a higher place in heaven than they would have from Baptism alone.

To receive Confirmation lawfully and fruitfully, a person must be in the state of grace—apart from the exceptional

case of which we spoke in the previous section (p. 20). Moreover, those who have reached the use of reason should have a knowledge of the Catholic religion suited to their years.

Strictly speaking, one who is in mortal sin is not obliged to go to confession before receiving Confirmation. Instead, he may make an act of perfect contrition for his sins, which will restore him to the state of grace, provided he intends to confess all his mortal sins when he next receives the sacrament of Penance. But it is always better for a person in such circumstances to go to confession, for he thus has greater assurance that he has recovered God's friendship. Besides those who are to be confirmed usually receive Holy Communion earlier the same day; and it is not sufficient for one in mortal sin to make an act of perfect contrition in preparation for the Holy Eucharist, but he must receive the sacrament of Penance.

Some Catholic parents have the strange notion that when their children have been confirmed their religious training is completed, and they can leave off all further study of the catechism. On the contrary, as this study of Confirmation has shown us, one who has been confirmed is thereby appointed an official expounder and defender of Catholic teachings. Consequently he has a greater obligation than before to study Catholic doctrines and practices in order to fit himself more perfectly for this exalted task.

Is Confirmation Necessary?

Confirmation is certainly not necessary with that kind of necessity that is technically known as *necessity of means.* A sacrament is necessary in this way when by its very nature, as Christ established it, it demands that a person receive it in order to be saved. Only two sacraments are so necessary for eternal salvation. Baptism for all human beings, and Pen-

ance for all who have fallen into mortal sin after Baptism.*

Theologians do not agree as to whether Confirmation is necessary with the *necessity of grave precept*—that is, whether Christ or His Church has imposed on all baptized persons a positive law, binding under pain of mortal sin, to receive Confirmation. Since therefore the obligation is doubtful, a Catholic could not be absolutely charged with mortal sin if he or she refused to receive this sacrament.

Undoubtedly however, it is the ardent wish of the Church that all her members be confirmed. It would seem to be at least a venial sin to fail to receive Confirmation when one can do so without any great inconvenience. The Church law explicitly states: "Although this sacrament is not necessary to salvation with the necessity of means, no one is permitted to neglect it, if the opportunity of receiving it is offered" (Canon 787). Moreover, the Church prescribes that a Catholic who is to be married or one who is about to enter the clerical or religious state should first be confirmed. Finally, one who would refuse to receive Confirmation through contempt would certainly be guilty of serious sin.

Conclusion

Doubtless most of those who have read this pamphlet have already received Confirmation. They should frequently thank God for this privilege. They should remember that the character which this sacrament has imprinted on their soul deputes them to profess publicly and, if necessary, to defend even at great inconvenience, their Catholic faith. They should remember too that from the sacramental grace of Confirma-

* In His mercy our Lord has decreed that although these two sacraments are necessary with the necessity of means, yet those who through no fault of their own cannot receive them and even those who can receive them but are not obliged to do so immediately, can partake of their principal effects by making an act of divine love or perfect contrition, which contains at least implicitly the desire of the needed sacrament.

tion they can derive the special helps they need to be active members of the Church and to take part zealously and effectively in some form of Catholic Action.

If any adult who has read this pamphlet has not as yet received Confirmation, it is the fervent hope of the author that this explanation of the precious supernatural effects of this sacrament will inspire that person to make arrangements to be confirmed as soon as possible. Even that well-ordered love for self which is inherent in human nature should urge every Catholic man or woman who has never been confirmed —whatever may have been the reason—to have his or her soul strengthened by the graces of this sacrament as soon as possible. The dangers to salvation that surround us today are indeed formidable, so that it seems incredible that any Catholic could believe in the salutary effects of Confirmation and yet refuse to receive it.

Above all, may those who read this pamphlet be impressed by the sublime dignity conferred by Confirmation on the members of the laity who share in the priestly power of Jesus Christ and labor in union with Him and His bishops and priests to bring the light of the true faith to all mankind.

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STUDY OUTLINE

Introduction

Confirmation is intended to bring the soul, born to the life of grace by Baptism, to a vigorous spiritual maturity. It is a sacrament of great importance in the Christian life.

The History of Confirmation

(a) The *Acts of the Apostles* describes a ceremony of prayer and the laying on of hands conferred by the apostles on the baptized to impart to them the Holy Ghost (*Acts,* VIII, 14-17; XIX, 5-6). Evidently this ceremony was a sacrament, though it is uncertain when Christ instituted it.

(b) Abundant testimony is found in early Christian writings to prove that this same ceremony was conferred from the beginning on baptized persons, and was recognized as a sacrament. From the fifth century it has been called Confirmation.

(c) Protestants and Modernists deny the sacramental nature of Confirmation, asserting that it was originally only an ecclesiastical ceremony or an accessory rite of Baptism; but the historical arguments which they adduce can be shown to have no probative force. Besides the Catholic Church, the non-Catholic Eastern denominations—such as the Greek Orthodox Church—regard Confirmation as a true sacrament.

The Ceremonies of Confirmation

(a) The essential elements of Confirmation at the present day are the anointing of the recipient's brow with chrism simultaneously with the placing of the bishop's hand on the person's head, and the words, spoken by the bishop: "I sign thee with the sign of the cross, and I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

(b) In the primitive Church Confirmation was usually desig-

nated as the imposition of hands, and it is uncertain whether chrism was used during the first three centuries. Probably Christ allowed the Church to determine specifically the essential elements of this sacrament, and by virtue of this delegation the Church used only the imposition of hands in the beginning, and later added the anointing with chrism.

(c) Chrism, the remote matter of Confirmation, is a mixture of olive oil and balm, blessed by a bishop. Ordinarily the blessing of chrism takes place at the Mass of Holy Thursday.

(d) On being confirmed a person has a sponsor, or godparent, who should not be the same person as the sponsor of Baptism. This godparent has obligations toward the religious training of the confirmed person.

(e) The ceremonies of Confirmation are deeply symbolic, signifying primarily the spiritual strength and the zeal for Christ's religion which should characterize those who have received this sacrament.

The Effects of Confirmation

(a) Confirmation imprints on the soul of the recipient an indelible character, which deputes him to explain and to defend publicly the truths of the Catholic faith, with due subordination to the official teachers of the Church. This character is a participation of the priesthood of Christ, more excellent than that conferred by Baptism, though inferior to that given by Holy Orders.

(b) Confirmation, when worthily received, gives sanctifying grace and a special sacramental grace which strengthens the recipient to proclaim and to defend the faith. This sacrament is by excellence the sacrament of the Holy Ghost, since it is peculiarly adapted to put into operation His seven gifts. It is also the sacrament of Catholic Action, since it empowers the recipient to promote actively the cause of the Catholic religion in cooperation with the clergy.

(c) One who has received Confirmation unworthily can acquire the graces of this sacrament by returning to the state of grace.

The Minister and the Recipient of Confirmation

(a) The ordinary minister of Confirmation is a bishop. Even a bishop who is separated from the Catholic Church retains the

power to confirm. Moreover, a simple priest can be delegated by the Pope to administer this sacrament. Among Christians of the Oriental rites Confirmation is usually given by priests, in virtue of such delegation.

(b) Any baptized person not yet confirmed can *validly* receive Confirmation. Even children below the age of reason can be confirmed validly and fruitfully. However, in the Latin Church it is customary to defer this sacrament until children have reached the use of reason. For validity one who has attained the use of reason must have the intention of receiving this sacrament. For the *fruitful* reception a person must be in the state of grace, although in exceptional cases Confirmation may give sanctifying grace to one in the state of mortal sin. The recipient should have a knowledge of the Catholic religion suited to his years, and after being confirmed he should be even more zealous in the study of Catholic doctrine and practice.

(c) Confirmation is not strictly necessary as a *means* of salvation. It is uncertain whether it is gravely obligatory on all Catholics by the *law of Christ* or of *the Church*. However, it is at least the wish of the Church that all her members receive this strengthening sacrament.

Conclusion

Those who have already been confirmed should ever be grateful to God for this privilege, and should be mindful of the obligations imposed on them by this sacrament, especially the duty to take part in Catholic Action. Adult Catholics who have not been confirmed should make an effort to receive this sacrament as soon as possible.

CHRIST IS GOD

By Rev. [illegible]

[illegible]

Therefore Christ is God.

●

[illegible] as man.

[illegible]

[illegible]

The SEVEN SACRAMENTS

By REV. FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

The Sacraments were instituted by Christ. Every Catholic should know the number, the names, the meaning of the ceremonies and effects of the Sacraments.

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Holy Eucharist

By

Rev. FRANCIS CONNELL,
C.SS.R., S.T.D.

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HOLY EUCHARIST

BY REV. FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

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Introduction

THE Holy Eucharist is the most excellent of the seven sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ for the sanctification of mankind. The other sacraments contain only the grace of Christ; this sacrament contains Christ Himself, as the spiritual nourishment of the faithful. Furthermore, the Holy Eucharist is not only a sacrament but also a sacrifice. Because of its preeminence in the sacramental system the Holy Eucharist is frequently designated the *Blessed* Sacrament.

The Holy Eucharist is the center of the liturgical and devotional life of the Catholic Church. It is in order that the Son of God in His sacrament of love may have suitable places in which to dwell that the Church erects majestic and beautiful cathedrals. To typify the fervor of her love for her divine Bridegroom she banks the altars high with fragrant flowers; she adorns her sacred functions with music and lights and incense because she wishes to surround the earthly throne of the King of kings with some faint image of the incomparable glory that surrounds His throne in heaven.

All Catholics should be familiar with at least the main doctrines of their faith concerning the Holy Eucharist, both for the development of their own spiritual life and for the sake of non-Catholics who question them about the Blessed Sacrament. It is the purpose of this pamphlet to present the principal teachings of the Church and the more important tenets of Catholic theology regarding this great mystery of faith under four headings—first, the Real Presence; second, the sacrifice of the Mass; third, the Holy Eucharist as a sacrament; fourth, the minister, recipient and necessity of the Holy Eucharist.

HOLY EUCHARIST

BY REVEREND FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

THE REAL PRESENCE

The Catholic Church teaches that in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine Jesus Christ is truly, really and substantially present. This is known as the doctrine of the Real Presence. Besides the Catholic Church, the Eastern churches separated from Catholic unity—such as the Greek Orthodox Church—accept this same doctrine. Some Lutherans and some Anglicans also believe in the Real Presence, although they do not agree with Catholics as to the manner in which our Lord becomes present. The majority of Protestants believe that the sacrament of the Eucharist—or the Lord's Supper, as they usually call it—as Christ instituted it was simply bread and wine as symbols or signs of His body and blood.

To present the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence clearly and adequately, we shall first expound the chief arguments which prove that Christ is really present in the Holy Eucharist; then we shall explain briefly the manner in which, according to Catholic faith and theology, the Real Presence takes place.

The Truth of the Real Presence

The sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel relates a series of incidents which occurred about a year before our Saviour's death. First, the Evangelist relates how our Lord fed a great multitude with only a few loaves of bread and a few fishes. Then he describes how his Divine Master walked on the waters of the Sea of Galilee to aid the apostles who were

overtaken in their frail bark by a mighty tempest. These wonderful miracles were doubtless intended by Christ as a kind of preface to a sermon He was to deliver the following day in the synagogue of Capharnaum, for they suggested to the hearers that one possessing so extensive powers over the forces of nature must be capable of fulfilling the marvelous promise that formed the gist of that sermon. This promise, made in the presence of His disciples and of a great multitude of the Jewish people, was that He would give His own flesh and blood to be the food and drink of men's souls. Over and over again, in the course of His sermon, He repeated that same theme: "I am the bread of life. . . . I am the living bread which came down from heaven. . . . The bread that I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world. . . . Amen, amen, I say unto you, except you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up in the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me and I in him" (*John,* VI, 48-57).

To those Christians who understand these words of our Saviour in a merely figurative sense—who claim that by the expression "to eat His flesh and drink His blood" Christ meant nothing more than to eat bread and to drink wine in order to symbolize the taking of Him into our hearts by faith and love—we put the plain, blunt question: "Does not an unbiased study of this scriptural passage prove that our Saviour promised to give His *true* body and blood to be the spiritual nourishment of mankind?" For, in the first place, Christ was speaking to simple, childlike people who understood whatever was told them in the literal sense. Surely before such an audience He, the lover of truth, would not make use of deceptive phrases or elusive figures of speech. Secondly, those who heard Him did actually understand Him to be speaking of His real flesh and blood, for they exclaimed: "How can this man give us his flesh to

eat? . . . This saying is hard, and who can hear it?" (*John*, VI, 53, 61). Now, if our Lord had intended the Holy Eucharist to be only a figure of His body and blood, He could and He should have corrected their false interpretation of His words. In fact, we know from a number of other incidents related in the New Testament that it was customary for Him, when His words were misunderstood, to explain more clearly His true meaning.* But on this occasion, when the listeners understood Him as referring to His real body and blood, and raised a protest, He gave no indication that He had been speaking metaphorically. On the contrary, He repeated His statement even more emphatically. Rather than retract or modify what He had said, He permitted many of His disciples to leave Him because they would not believe so stupendous a doctrine. Evidently, the Son of God meant just what He had said—that He would give His true body and blood to be the spiritual food and drink of His followers.

A year passed: the appointed span of Christ's mortal life was drawing to a close. On the Thursday evening preceding the day on which He was to endure a death of agony and shame, our Saviour assembled His disciples around Him at the supper-table to speak to them His parting words of love. When the simple meal was ended, He took a piece of bread from the table, blessed and broke it, and gave it to His companions to eat, saying: "Take ye and eat; this is my body." Then taking a cup of wine He gave thanks, and handed it to the disciples, with the words: "Drink ye all of this. For this is my blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins" (*Matthew*, XXVI, 26-28).

Could our divine Lord have declared more clearly and more simply that His body and blood were actually contained beneath the appearances of bread and wine? He did not say: "This *represents* my body; this *is a figure* of my

* See, for example, *John*, IV, 32-34; XI, 11-14.

blood," but "This *is* my body; this *is* my blood." In those last hours of His mortal life, would He have led into error the disciples who so implicitly trusted Him? Would He have deceived the millions who, as He knew, in future ages would adore Him as really present in the Blessed Sacrament because of those words spoken at the Last Supper? Unless we are willing to charge the Son of God with telling a terrible lie, we must admit that He gave the disciples His real, physical body and blood beneath the appearances of bread and wine on that first Holy Thursday.

Moreover, on this same occasion Christ bestowed on the apostles the power to work the same miracle He had wrought—that is, to change bread and wine into His body and blood. For, after He had performed this sacred rite, He said: "Do this for a commemoration of me" (*Luke,* XXII, 19). Evidently, therefore, the rite of changing bread and wine into His body and blood and of partaking of them, which our Lord instituted at the Last Supper, was to be perpetuated in the Church for all times as a means of sanctifying the faithful—in other words, was to be a sacrament. Since the sacred powers communicated by our Lord to the apostles were intended by Him to be transmitted to their successors, the marvelous power of changing bread and wine into the sacrament of Christ's body and blood has ever been exercised and will be exercised until the end of time by those who succeed the apostles in the work of the sacred ministry—the priests and bishops of the Catholic Church.

Innumerable statements could be quoted from writings which date from the earliest centuries of the Christian era proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that Christians in those days universally held the doctrine of the Real Presence. Thus, St. Ignatius of Antioch, who died about the year 110, wrote of the Docetae, an heretical sect: "They abstain from the Eucharist and the prayer because they do not believe that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins and which the Father in His bounty raised up again" (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans,* VII, 1). St.

Justin, who died in the year 167, and St. Cyprian, who died in 258, wrote in the same vein.

These are but a few of the countless testimonies that go to show that Christian tradition from the beginning has been unanimously in agreement with the doctrine of the Real Presence which the Catholic Church holds today. The first to deny the doctrine of the Real Presence among those who professed to be Christians was Berengarius of Tours in the eleventh century, and he won very few followers. No large group of Christians rejected this doctrine until the rise of Protestantism in the sixteenth century. Catholics have always unhesitatingly believed that in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist Jesus Christ is truly in our midst.

The Manner of the Real Presence

The Catholic Church teaches as an article of faith that the method by which Christ becomes present in this sacrament is transubstantiation — that is, the change of the entire substance of the bread into His body and the change of the entire substance of the wine into His blood, while there remain only the accidents of the bread and wine.

To understand transubstantiation we must analyze the composition of a material thing—a piece of bread, for example. In the first place, there is something in it which makes it this particular thing, different from all other things, and this we call the *substance* of the bread. However, all that our senses perceive—such as whiteness, sweetness, softness—is distinct from the substance. Our very manner of speaking of these things shows that we recognize this fact, for we always refer to them as entities distinct from the bread itself—the whiteness *of* the bread, the sweetness *of* the bread, etc. These qualifying entities may be changed, while the substance existing beneath them remains unchanged. Thus, a piece of bread that was soft may become hard, it may become cold after it was hot—yet it remains the same piece of bread. The change was only on the part of these entities that come under the scope of the senses—and

which are called *accidents* or *species* or *appearances*—while the substance of bread, which our senses cannot perceive, remained the same.

Now, the process by which Christ becomes present in the Holy Eucharist is a change which is the very opposite of that which we have just described. In this eucharistic change the accidents of bread (or wine) remain the same, while the substance of bread (or wine) becomes the body (or blood) of our Lord. Obviously, this change cannot be perceived by any of our senses, since only the accidents, and not the substance of a thing come under their domain.

Furthermore, we believe that the *entire* substance of the bread (or wine) is changed into the body (or blood) of Christ, and from this standpoint transubstantiation differs from all substantial changes effected by the powers of nature. For in every natural substantial change something of the substance changed remains over, and forms part of the new substance. Thus, when hydrogen peroxide is changed into water by the application of heat, there is an unchanging substratum common to both substances. This element, in the terminology of Aristotelian philosophy, is known as the *matter*. However, in each of the two substances there is also an element which determines the indeterminate matter and makes one substance hydrogen peroxide and the other water. This element is called the *form*. Since in the ordinary substantial change it is only the form of the first substance that departs to make way for the form of the new substance, such a change is known as a *transformation*.

However, in the eucharistic change both the matter and the form of the bread and wine pass away, and in their place come the body and blood of our Saviour. Accordingly, this change is called *transubstantiation*, since it is the change of the *entire* substance.

The doctrine of transubstantiation is proved from the words uttered by Christ when He instituted the Holy Eucharist—"This is my body." When He had said these words, the substance of bread must have ceased to be present, and His

body must have taken its place. If the bread had remained and He had entered into it, as Martin Luther taught, Christ would have had to say: "In this bread is my body" or "This is bread and my body." But by saying: "This is my body," He showed that the substance of the bread had been changed into His real body. That this change was a transubstantiation, and not a mere transformation, follows from the fact that the living body of Christ was distinct not only in form but also in matter from the bread which He had just taken from the table.

The tradition of the Church corroborates this argument from Scripture. It was always believed by Catholics that in the sacrifice of the Mass the same body and blood of Christ which are in heaven become present on the altar by a change of the bread and wine. In the twelfth century the term *transubstantiation* was applied to this change. But it was only a new name to describe more exactly and more scientifically a doctrine which had been believed with less precision and in a more popular way from the very beginning.

After transubstantiation takes place, the accidents of the bread and wine which remain unchanged, are sustained in being by the power of God, just as they were previously supported in existence by the substance of the bread and wine. Since it is the accidents of a substance that directly act and are acted upon, and not the substance itself, a consecrated host manifests the same activity and is affected by the same modifications as an ordinary piece of bread. It nourishes the recipient by the process of digestion; it is subject to corruption; it can be acted on by chemical agents. All this is quite in conformity with the doctrine of transubstantiation, since in all these cases it is the accidents that directly act or are acted upon, just as it is the accidents that directly act or are acted upon when an ordinary piece of bread furnishes nourishment or is corrupted or chemically analyzed.

The Catholic Church also teaches that by transubstantiation the *whole* Christ—that is, our Lord with His body, blood, soul and divinity—is present under each of the

consecrated species, both of bread and of wine. It is true, the priest pronounces over the bread only the words: "This is my body." Yet, since these words bring to the altar the *same* body of Christ that is in heaven, and that body is inseparably united to His blood, His soul and His divinity, the entire Christ becomes present immediately—His body by reason of the words of consecration; His blood, soul and divinity by reason of their connexion or concomitance, with His body. In a similar manner the entire Christ is present under the appearances of wine after the priest has said only the words "This is the chalice of my blood, etc."—His blood by reason of the words of consecration; His body, soul and divinity by reason of concomitance or connexion.

It must not be imagined that Christ is present in the Holy Eucharist in a reduced form. His human body is contained in the small host in the same form and with the same size that it possesses in heaven. However, it is not related to space in the way that bodies are naturally related—that is, in such a manner that each part of the body occupies a separate part of the space. Just as the human soul exists whole and entire in every part of the body, so the body of Christ, while remaining a true material body, exists in its entirety and with its perfect dimensions in every part of the consecrated species. Theologians express this stupendous phenomenon of the divine power by saying that our Lord's body has no *external extension* with reference to the place occupied by the consecrated species. It is because of this mode of His sacramental existence that the consecrated host can be broken into many parts, yet our Lord's body is not divided, but remains whole and entire in each part.

Christ remains present in the Holy Eucharist as long as the accidents, or appearances of bread and wine remain. For, He takes the place of the substance of bread and wine, and that would remain as long as the accidents could be truly said to be accidents of bread and wine; hence, the same length of time marks the period of our Lord's presence in the Blessed Sacrament. After holy communion the change of the acci-

dents is effected by the process of digestion, and normally takes about fifteen minutes. When the appearances of bread and wine have been entirely modified, the sacramental presence of our Saviour ceases, and that substance which would have resulted from the disintegration of ordinary bread and wine becomes present.

The doctrine of transubstantiation with its many mysterious phases baffles our imagination and surpasses our understanding. Yet, God has revealed this doctrine to us and we must believe it. It would be the height of arrogance and of folly to restrict the power of the Almighty to the sphere of our finite intelligence. All the objections brought against the doctrines of the Real Presence and Transubstantiation are but a repetition of the objections urged against Christ Himself when He promised to give His flesh and blood for the spiritual nourishment of mankind: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat? . . . This saying is hard, and who can hear it?" (*John*, VI, 53, 61). But to those who humbly accept the word of God the Blessed Sacrament offers no difficulty, for they know that the power and the love of Jesus Christ cannot be measured by human standards.

THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

The Mass as a Sacrifice

The most impressive religious function celebrated in the Catholic Church is the Mass. Even those who refuse to admit any supernatural significance in the Mass and view it as a ceremony of merely human origin and value readily grant that this sacred rite is a masterpiece of dramatic art, breathing a spirit of reverence and worship such as cannot be found in any other religious act performed on earth.

To Catholics, however, the external features of the Mass are but a faint shadow of the intrinsic significance of this sacred rite, which is known only by faith. For Catholics believe that the Mass is a sacrifice wherein are offered to God the body and blood of His divine Son, Jesus Christ.

The Mass, we say, is a sacrifice. From the very beginning of the human race the offering of sacrifice has been a religious act of universal usage. The Bible relates that Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve, offered sacrifices; Noe offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God after being saved from the deluge (*Genesis,* IV, 3, 4; VIII, 20). Even pagans and idol-worshippers, such as the ancient Greeks and Romans, and the Aztecs of Mexico had an elaborate system of sacrificial rites in honor of their divinities. Apparently there is a natural inclination in the human soul to express its adoration of the Supreme Being by some kind of sacrificial ceremony. The Almighty adapted Himself to this natural inclination when in His revelation to Moses He was laying down the laws regarding the religious ceremonies to be conducted by the Jewish people, as he prescribed a number of sacrifices, and described the precise manner in which they were to be offered (*Leviticus,* XXII, XXIII).

If we examine the various sacrifices that have been acceptable to the true God, we shall find that they are made up of two elements—first, the offering to God of some material object, called the victim; and second, the slaying or destruction of that object. The more important of these two factors is the offering, which must be made by a specially deputed official called a priest. The destruction of the victim can be done by any person.

Each of these two elements of sacrifice has its special significance.* The offering of the victim is an emphatic way of stating that God is the Creator and supreme Ruler of all things, and therefore worthy of man's profoundest homage; the destruction of the victim signifies that man realizes he deserves to be destroyed by God for his sins, yet craves God's pardon. The act of offering, while directly intended to adore the Almighty because of His sovereign power, indirectly aims at thanking Him for his favors in the past and at asking Him

* Catholic scholars are not in complete agreement in explaining the nature of sacrifice. The author follows the explanation proposed by Father de la Taille, S.J.

for more favors in the future. Thus, every true sacrifice has four objects—adoration, thanksgiving, petition and atonement. This last is twofold—propitiation for sin and satisfaction for the temporal punishment due to sin.

The Catholic Church teaches that the Mass is a sacrifice in which the victim is Christ Himself. For, the Mass is the repetition of the rite performed by our Saviour at the Last Supper; and He performed on that occasion a sacrificial act. In instituting the Holy Eucharist, He said: "This is my body *which is given for you*" (Luke, XXII, 19); "This is my blood of the new testament *which is shed for many unto remission of sins*" (*Matthew,* XXVI, 28). Now, the expression "to give a body for some one," "to shed blood unto the remission of sin" were technical phrases in common use among the Jewish people to signify the offering of sacrifice. And it is important to note that, although in our English version of the New Testament Christ is reported as saying of the chalice of His blood that "it *shall* be shed, etc.," yet in the Greek text of all the Evangelists who narrate the Last Supper the present tense "it is being shed" is used—clearly indicating that there, at the Last Supper, a sacrifice was being offered.

If space permitted, we could give citations from the early writers, such as St. Irenaeus, Tertullian and St. Cyprian, proving that they, who lived so close to the time of Christ's apostles, believed in the sacrificial character of the Mass just as explicitly as do the Catholics of the present day. Indeed, the Mass has always been recognized by Catholics as a sacrifice and has ever been the chief religious act in the Catholic Church just because it is a sacrifice, the highest act of divine worship.

The most common objection against the Catholic doctrine that the Mass is a true sacrifice is that Christ, by His death on the cross, offered to His heavenly Father a sacrifice of infinite value, so that other sacrifices are not needed—and in fact, are even irreverent, since they imply that Christ's sacrifice was not sufficient.

This objection is based on a complete misunderstanding of what the Catholic Church teaches concerning the relation between the sacrifice of Calvary and the sacrifice of the Mass. They are not two entirely distinct and independent sacrifices. On the contrary, the Mass is the *renewal* of the sacrifice of the Cross, for in the Mass we have the same Victim who was sacrificed on Calvary, offering Himself through the ministry of His priest as He offered Himself directly on the Cross. Neither are there any fruits *added* by the Mass to those of Calvary, as if these latter were insufficient for the salvation of mankind. On the contrary the Mass only *applies* to individual souls down through the centuries the fruits which Christ once merited by the sacrifice of the Cross. Just as a reflector directs the light from an electric bulb to a particular part of the room, without adding any light of itself, so the Mass directs the supernatural benefits of the Cross to particular individuals. So, instead of detracting from the glory of the sacrifice of His life which our Lord offered nineteen centuries ago, the Mass rather emphasizes the power and the efficacy of that sacrifice.

The most important part of the Mass is the consecration, which takes place about the middle of the sacred ceremony, when the priest changes the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ by repeating the words uttered by our Lord at the Last Supper: "This is my body. . . . This is my blood. . . ." By this act of consecration the priest offers our Saviour as a Victim of sacrifice to His eternal Father. As was stated above, this act of offering and the destruction of the victim constitute the two requisite elements of a sacrifice. Now, the destruction of the divine Victim took place on Calvary, when Christ's body and blood were separated by the crucifixion. This destruction retains its sacrificial efficacy for all time. But in every Mass there is a new offering of the divine Victim, which takes place when the priest by the words of consecration causes the body of our Saviour to be present under the appearances of bread and His blood to be present under the appearances of

wine, and thus symbolically reproduces the separation of body and blood that actually took place on Calvary. This vivid representation of Christ's real death is called the mystic immolation of the Mass, and it is this which constitutes the offering to God of his well-beloved Son.

At the communion of the Mass the priest partakes of the body and blood of our Lord which He has consecrated. The sacrifice is completed in its integrity even if no one else but the priest communicates. However, it is the wish of the Church that when possible those who assist at Mass shall also receive holy communion.

In the course of the centuries since Christ instituted the Mass there has been a considerable variation in the prayers and ceremonies with which the Church has enhanced the holy sacrifice. Even at the present day there is a large number of different rites and languages—at least ten—in which the eucharistic sacrifice is offered by Catholic priests. Most of the Catholics in the United States belong to the Roman rite, in which the Mass is celebrated in Latin. The majority of the Catholics living in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor and northern Africa are members of one or other of the Oriental rites, in which the holy sacrifice is celebrated in an Eastern language, such as Greek or Syrian or Armenian. Despite these accidental differences, the sacred eucharistic rite at which all Catholics assist is essentially the same throughout the entire world—the unbloody sacrifice commemorating and renewing for all time the infinite sacrifice of Himself which the Son of God offered to His Father on the Cross of Calvary nineteen hundred years ago.

The Effects of the Mass

As was stated above, the effects of the Mass are grouped under four headings—adoration, thanksgiving, petition and atonement. The first two are rendered to God, the other two —which are specifically known as the *fruits* of the Mass— are for the benefit of men. As given by the Mass these fruits are only the application of the meritorious and satisfactory values gained for us by Christ's sacrifice on the Cross.

Every Mass immediately and infallibly gives adoration and thanksgiving to the Almighty—and that, even though the priest were to celebrate unworthily, in the state of mortal sin. For Christ is the principal priest and the victim of every Mass and His part in the sacrifice will necessarily render praise and gratitude to the Eternal Father, even though the human offerer be defiled. In view of this fact we can perceive the full force of the prediction which God spoke through the prophet Malachias almost five centuries before Christ, and which undoubtedly referred to the Mass, ever holy and pure: "From the rising of the sun even to the going down my name is great among the gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to my name a clean oblation" (*Malachias,* I, 11). Nevertheless, the personal holiness of the priest and of the other persons who co-operate in the offering of a Mass makes the sacrifice more pleasing to God and more efficacious in procuring spiritual and temporal benefits.

The effects of the Mass intended for mankind—petition and atonement—depend for their application on certain conditions. Thus, to consider the former, a Mass offered for a person's spiritual benefit, will surely move God to grant him some special graces; but he may frustrate their efficacy by rejecting them. Again, a person may have a Mass offered for some temporal favor—the restoration of health, success in business—yet not receive the favor because God foresees that it would not be for his spiritual good. In such a case however, the Mass will surely obtain some benefit which will be to the individual's real advantage if properly used.

The atoning effect of the Mass has a twofold object—the remission of sin and the payment of the debt of temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven. The former of these two ends is attained by the Mass only indirectly. In other words, the Mass does not forgive sins and infuse sanctifying grace in the same way as does the sacrament of Penance; but it can obtain for the sinner an actual grace enabling him to repent and to make his peace with God. However, the satis-

faction of the debt of temporal punishment procured by the Mass would seem to be more direct. That is, whenever a person in the state of grace but burdened with a debt of temporal punishment participates in the benefits of a Mass he will receive the remission of some measure of the punishment.

It is an article of the Catholic faith that the souls in purgatory are aided by the sacrifice of the Mass. And it is commendable for the faithful to have Masses offered for their dear departed. The fruit of the Holy sacrifice which is beneficial to the suffering souls is satisfaction for their debt of temporal punishment. However, there is no infallible assurance that a Mass offered for a particular soul in purgatory will actually be applied by God for that soul. He may accept its atoning efficacy for some friendless and forgotten soul yearning for the joys of heaven. This is the answer to the objection, so frequently heard, that according to Catholic teaching a rich man can buy his way out of purgatory after death by leaving a large amount of money to be given as Mass-stipends for the repose of his soul.

The recipients of the fruits of the Mass are, in the first place, all the members of the Church, and in some measure and manner all mankind. For, at the Offertory of the Mass the priest includes among those for whom he is offering the holy sacrifice "all faithful Christians, living or dead", and shortly afterward he prays that the chalice of Christ's precious blood may be of profit "for our salvation and for that of the whole world". Special fruits are bestowed on all who cooperate in the celebration of a Mass—the priest, the servers, the choir, those who devoutly assist, etc. Moreover, the priest may offer each Mass for the particular benefit of some determined person or persons. It is this fruit that is applied according to the intention of the one who gives a stipend for a Mass. It is well to remark in passing that the stipend is not the price of the Mass. Every Mass is a spiritual thing of unlimited value, and cannot be bought or sold. The stipend corresponds to the gift of bread and wine which the faithful in former centuries brought to the priest when they requested

him to say a Mass for their intention, and which, besides furnishing the matter for the holy sacrifice, provided the day's sustenance for the priest. Later the custom arose of contributing this offering in the form of an equivalent sum of money; but the purpose—to provide for the day's support of the priest and to procure bread and wine for the Mass—remains the same.

The measure of the fruits produced by each Mass is unknown to us. It depends primarily on the justice and mercy of God. Of course, from the standpoint of the chief Priest and the Victim, Jesus Christ, the efficacy of every Mass is unlimited. But the human participants—both those who offer the Mass and those for whom it is offered—must be reckoned with, and if they are lacking in fervor and reverence the actual value of the holy sacrifice is doubtless greatly curtailed.

It is to be noted that the Catholic Church offers the sacrifice of the Mass to God alone. For, by its very nature a sacrifice expresses the highest type of adoration, which is due to the Deity only. We do indeed speak of Masses being offered in honor of the Blessed Virgin or the saints; but this simply means that we direct the holy sacrifice particularly toward thanking God for the great gifts He has bestowed on His Mother and His saints, and petition Him to inspire these blessed ones to intercede for us.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST AS A SACRAMENT

Matter and Form

In every sacrament we distinguish two elements—a material thing or a human action, which is called the *matter,* and a determined formula of words, which is called the *form.* The Holy Eucharist is unique among the sacraments in that it has two distinct phases—the moment of consecration and the subsequent period of time during which our Lord remains in the consecrated host and chalice. We shall study the constituent elements of this sacrament under both these aspects.

At the actual time of consecration the matter of the Holy

Eucharist is bread and wine. These are the two materials that Christ Himself used at the Last Supper to consecrate into His body and blood, and the Church has always regarded them as necessary elements of the Blessed Sacrament. However, to be most precise, we must say that bread from wheat and wine from grapes must be used. Bread and wine from any other source—for example, bread from rye or corn, wine from cherries or elderberries—could not be validly consecrated. The scriptural account of the Last Supper explicitly states that the wine used by Christ was the juice of the grape. Although it does not assert so clearly that the bread was made of wheaten flour, the tradition of the Church has ever proposed this type of bread as necessary matter for the sacrament. In the bread and the wine—one of which is made from many grains of wheat and the other from many grapes—spiritual writers see an image of the Church, which is nourished by the Holy Eucharist, and which is one, though composed of many individual members.

For the validity of the Holy Eucharist and the Mass, the bread can be either leavened (made with yeast) or unleavened (made without yeast). The law of the Church prescribes in regard to this distinction of quality of bread that every priest shall observe the ruling of his own rite. In Mass said according to the Latin rite unleavened bread is used while in most of the Oriental rites leavened bread is employed. However, the faithful of any rite may receive holy communion according to the manner of any other Catholic rite, even from mere devotion.*

The wine should be fermented; however, newly pressed grape-juice, or *must,* can be validly consecrated, and in certain cases a priest would be permitted to use it for the holy sacrifice. Before consecrating the wine, the priest (in all Catholic rites) adds a few drops of water. Our Lord is believed to have done this before He changed the wine into

* But the Viaticum must be given, when possible, according to the rite of the recipient; and it is recommended that every one make his Easter duty in his own rite.

His blood; moreover, this mixture symbolizes the union of the faithful with Christ and also reminds us of the blood and water that flowed from the side of our dead Saviour.

The form of the Holy Eucharist in its consecration is made up of the words by which the priest changes the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ—namely, over the bread: "For this is my body", and over the chalice of wine: "For this is the chalice of my blood, of the new and eternal testament; the mystery of faith; which shall be shed for you and for many unto the remission of sins". Before saying these solemn words—the same words substantially that our Lord used in consecrating the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper—the priest pronounces a few sentences narrating the occurrences at the institution of this sacrament, to the effect that Christ took bread and the chalice in His hands, gave thanks to God, etc. Some theologians are of the opinion that these words too are necessary for the validity of the consecration, so that it may be evident that the words *"My* body . . . *My* blood" refer to the body and blood of Christ, and not to the body and blood of the priest himself.

A priest is never permitted to consecrate the Holy Eucharist outside the sacrifice of the Mass. However, if a priest did pronounce the requisite words over bread and wine at any time, having the intention to change them into the body and blood of our Lord, the consecration would be valid. But it is doubtful if a priest could consecrate bread or wine alone, without intending to consecrate the other element at the same time.

After consecration the constituents of the Holy Eucharist are the body of Christ and the sacred species. These last are sometimes called the matter of the Blessed Sacrament under this aspect. There is no form to the Holy Eucharist in this, its permanent phase. The words which the priest says when giving holy communion—"May the body of our Lord Jesus Christ protect thy soul unto eternal life. Amen"—are not a sacramental form, but merely a prayer that the recipient may derive the fullest measure of spiritual profit from union with our divine Saviour.

The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the tabernacle of every Catholic church, first, to provide the Viaticum—the "parting communion"—for the dying; second, to be the object of devotion of the faithful. The Church has established a variety of beautiful eucharistic devotions centering around the Holy Eucharist, thus reserved outside of Mass—for example, Exposition, Benediction, processions. All these devotions are but the logical application of the doctrine that our Lord remains present in the consecrated host as long as the appearances of bread remain. Moreover, it is a commendable custom, practiced by many Catholics, to visit our Saviour abiding in the tabernacle. Those who practice this devotion know that it is a source of indescribable enlightenment, strength and consolation in the weary battle of life. A spiritual communion, or ardent desire to receive Christ into our hearts, is a very appropriate act when we visit the Blessed Sacrament.

The Effects of Holy Communion

It is a general theological principle that every sacrament, when worthily received, produces a twofold grace—sanctifying grace and sacramental grace. When the recipient has been in a state of mortal sin up to the moment he receives the sacrament, and is then forgiven and justified, he is said to have received *first* grace; but when one is already in the state of grace at the time the sacrament is conferred, the increase of sanctifying grace that is then given him is called *second* grace. Sacramental grace is a special supernatural help, peculiar to each sacrament, and adapted to enable the recipient to attain to the end of the sacrament.

Since the Holy Eucharist is a sacrament of the living, intended for those who possess the life of grace, the sanctifying grace which it normally confers is second grace. One who would knowingly receive this divine sacrament in the state of mortal sin would add another grave sin to the transgressions with which his soul is already burdened. However, it is generally held by theologians that if a person in mortal sin receives holy communion without consciousness of his unworthiness,

and at the same time has attrition, or imperfect contrition, for his sins, he will be pardoned, and will be given first grace.

The sacramental grace of holy communion is, in general, an intimate union with the humanity of Christ. This union produces various supernatural effects, the first of which is the stimulating of love for God in the soul of the communicant. It is most appropriate that the sacrament which is the supreme proof of our Saviour's love for mankind should be especially efficacious in arousing love for God in those who receive it devoutly.

Containing as it does the sinless Heart of Christ, the Holy Eucharist is a most effective protection against sin, especially against sins of the flesh to which our fallen human nature is so sorely tempted. When our Saviour comes into the heart that is beset by temptation, He calms the storm of passion, as He once calmed the raging waters of the sea by commanding: "Peace, be still".

Venial sins can be forgiven by holy communion—not directly, but indirectly—by the power of the acts of love which this sacrament inspires. In the same manner, some of the debt of temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven is taken away by a worthy communion. And oftentimes delight of soul and peace of heart are given by our Lord to those who receive Him fervently. However, this last is not a necessary effect of holy communion, so that its absence is not an indication that one has not received the Blessed Sacrament worthily.

Holy communion also gives a special title to a glorious resurrection of the body. Christ Himself promised this effect, when He said: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life; and I will raise him up in the last day" (*John,* VI, 55). Finally, love for our fellow-men, especially the other members of the Church is greatly strengthened by holy communion. Nowadays, when so much stress is being placed on the development of the social virtues, Catholics should remember that the basis of all social virtue is the oneness of all men, either actually or potentially, in the

Mystical Body of Christ; and the most effective means of fostering that oneness is the participation by all in the communion of our Lord's real body.

The effects of holy communion are proportioned to the fervor of the recipient. Hence, the importance of preparing our hearts for the coming of Christ by acts of faith, hope and love, and of devoting at least a quarter of an hour afterward to thanking our Lord for His great gift of Himself and asking Him for the graces and favors we need most urgently.

Sometimes Catholics offer their holy communion for some one else, either a living person or a soul in purgatory. This does not mean that one can transfer to another the *sacramental* effects of holy communion—for these are always restricted to the recipient himself. But the prayers that are recited before and after holy communion possess the power to move God to grant favors and the power to make satisfaction for temporal punishment, and these values can be transferred by the communicant to others. Moreover, on the occasion of holy communion one can always gain indulgences applicable to the souls in purgatory.

It must be noted that the primary purpose of holy communion is to give us the humanity, rather than the divinity, of Jesus Christ. It is true, He is present in the Holy Eucharist both as God and as man. However, we can possess His divinity in our souls at all times by remaining in the state of grace. But it is only at the time of holy communion, and then only for a few minutes that we enjoy the inestimable privilege of being intimately united with the human nature of our Lord—the same human nature that was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that suffered on Calvary, that is now enthroned in glory in heaven at the right hand of the Father.

Holy Communion Under One Species

It is sometimes objected by those who are not members of the Catholic Church that the Church fails to fulfil the commandment of Christ regarding the Holy Eucharist, for the Master said that all must eat His flesh *and* drink His blood,

whereas the Catholic Church gives holy communion only under the form of bread, and refuses to allow the laity to partake of the consecrated chalice.

From the doctrine explained in the first section of this pamphlet we can easily answer this objection. As was there stated, the *entire* ~~Church~~ is present both under the appearances of bread and under the appearances of wine; so that one who receives only the consecrated bread not only eats the flesh of Christ but also drinks His blood.

Of course, our Lord could have made it a matter of obligation for the faithful to receive holy communion under both species. He did indeed command the apostles and their successors in the priesthood to do this whenever they celebrate Mass. This obligation was promulgated at the Last Supper, when Christ said: "Do this for a commemoration of me". But the practice of the Church, the official interpreter of Christ's law, from the earliest centuries proves that Christ gave no such command to the faithful in general. It is true, during the first twelve centuries of the Christian era it was the usual custom for all to receive holy communion under both species. Yet, even during those times there were exceptions. In the days of persecution the members of the Church took the Blessed Sacrament to their homes under the form of bread alone to communicate themselves if they were in danger of martyrdom. The sick too, were communicated under the species of bread alone. This method of receiving holy communion became general between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, and was made obligatory by ecclesiastical law for the faithful of the Latin rite in the fifteenth century. There are good reasons for administering holy communion in this way—for example, the danger of spilling the consecrated wine; the repugnance that many would experience in communicating from the same chalice.

In Catholic churches of the Oriental rite it is still the usual custom for the faithful to receive both consecrated species. Usually the priest puts a particle of the consecrated bread on a spoon, dips it in the chalice of consecrated wine, and then

places the particle on the extended tongue of the communicant. As was said before, any Catholic may receive holy communion in this way when he assists at Mass in a Catholic church of an Oriental rite.

THE MINISTER, THE RECIPIENT AND THE NECESSITY OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

The Minister

Only a bishop or a priest can validly consecrate the Holy Eucharist. For our Lord conferred the great power of changing bread and wine into His body and blood only on the apostles and their successors. From the constant tradition of the Church it is evident that only those men are the successors of the apostles in the possession of this power who have received the priesthood, either in its higher degree (bishops) or in its lower degree (priests). When a man is ordained to the priesthood the bishop places in his hands a chalice with wine and a paten with altar-bread, and says: "Receive thou the power to offer sacrifice to God and to celebrate Masses both for the living and for the dead".

A priest must be in the state of grace and be recognized by the Church as a clergyman in good standing to exercise *lawfully* the power of consecrating the Holy Eucharist and of offering Mass. However, even though a priest be in sin or separated from the Church he can always exercise this power *validly*. Accordingly, the Oriental churches separated for many centuries from Catholic unity still have the Holy Eucharist and the Mass because they have retained an unbroken line of priests and bishops through the proper administration of Holy Orders. But the same is not true of the Anglican and Protestant Episcopal churches which lost the priesthood in the sixteenth century when every reference to the power of offering the sacrifice of the Mass—the chief power of the priest—was omitted from their rite of priestly ordination.

Although only a priest or a bishop can consecrate the Holy Eucharist, under certain circumstances a deacon may adminis-

ter holy communion. Indeed, in extraordinary cases even a lay person is permitted to give this sacrament to himself or to others, when no ordained minister is present—for example, when the recipient is in danger of death or when there is fear that the Holy Eucharist may be profaned.

In offering the sacrifice of the Mass, the priest acts not as a private individual but as the official representative of the members of the Church, so that, in a certain sense, even the laity can be said to offer Mass through the priest. This point is brought out in the prayers of the Mass itself wherein the priest speaks of himself as offering Mass in conjunction with the faithful; and before the Preface he urges those present to pray "that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable before God, the Father almighty". Hence, a Catholic should assist at Mass with the thought that he is actively participating in the offering of the holy sacrifice. It is a great aid toward intimately co-operating in the sacred ceremony to follow the words and actions of the priest in a Missal.

The Recipient

To receive holy communion validly one must be baptized, for Christ has laid down the law that Baptism must precede the reception of any other sacrament. An unbaptized person could indeed consume a consecrated host; but this would not constitute a *sacramental* reception of the Holy Eucharist, nor would he receive any grace thereby, although our Lord would really be present in his body. Of course, such an action on the part of an unbaptized person would be grave sacrilege if he realized what he was doing.

To receive the fruits of holy communion one must be in the state of sanctifying grace. One who would dare to partake of this great sacrament knowing that he is at enmity with God would defile his soul with another serious sin. However, as was previously stated, one who receives holy communion in mortal sin but without realizing the wrong he is doing, will most probably recover the state of grace if he has imperfect contrition. Moreover, venial sins, however

numerous and deliberate, in a person who possesses the state of grace do not render his communions unworthy. At the same time they form an obstacle to the reception of the full measure of the grace which this sacrament can impart.

One who has committed a mortal sin must go to confession and be absolved before he is permitted to receive holy communion. Such a person can indeed regain the state of grace by an act of perfect contrition with the intention of subsequently going to confession. After making such an act he may receive any other sacrament of the living save the Holy Eucharist—for example, Confirmation or Matrimony. But there is a special precept* obliging every one who has committed mortal sin after Baptism to obtain the sacramental remission of the sin by the sacrament of Penance before he may receive holy communion.

If a baptized child who has not yet attained to the age of reason is given holy communion he will derive spiritual benefit from this sacrament. It is customary among the Christians of the Eastern rites, both Catholics and non-Catholics, to administer the Holy Eucharist under the form of wine to infants immediately after Baptism. However, this is not permitted in the Latin rite. In this rite the obligation to receive holy communion and the right to receive it come with the use of reason—generally about the seventh year.

By a law of the Church dating from the early centuries a person is not allowed to receive holy communion unless he has abstained entirely from food and drink from midnight. Any generally received system of time may be used in computing the midnight hour. Thus, when "daylight saving time" is in vogue, the time for the eucharistic fast can be computed from one o'clock, which is midnight according to standard time. Moreover, the time is to be reckoned according to the place in which one wishes to receive holy communion.

In two exceptional cases one may receive the Holy Eucharist without fasting—first, when he is in danger of death

* It is uncertain whether this is a law of God or of the Church only.

and is receiving this sacrament as Viaticum. Second, when he consumes the Blessed Sacrament to preserve it from profanation. Moreover, by a special dispensation of the Church a person who has been confined to bed for a month and has no sure expectation of a speedy recovery may, with the advice of his confessor, receive holy communion once or twice a week after having taken some medicine or liquid nourishment.*

It is well to remark that one does not really receive holy communion until he has swallowed the consecrated host. Therefore, after the Blessed Sacrament has been administered to a person, he should not permit it to dissolve in his mouth but should swallow it as soon as possible.

The Necessity of the Holy Eucharist

The Holy Eucharist is not necessary for salvation with that strict kind of obligation known as the necessity of *means.* This belongs only to Baptism—for all—and to Penance—for all who have sinned mortally after Baptism. However, the Holy Eucharist is necessary with the necessity of *precept* by reason of the command of Christ: "Amen, amen, I say unto you, except you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you" (*John,* VI, 54). Our Lord did not specify how frequently the faithful must receive this sacrament; so that as far as His commandment is concerned, it would be fulfilled if one approached the holy table from time to time during life, and received the Viaticum when in danger of death. But the Church, as the authorized representative of Christ, has determined that all the faithful, after coming to the use of reason, are obliged under pain of mortal sin to receive holy communion at least once a year, during the Easter season. According to the strict law of the Church the Easter season lasts only two weeks—from the Sunday before Easter to the Sunday after this feast. But in the United States, by special concession, the Easter season lasts fourteen weeks—from the first Sunday of Lent to Trinity

* Non-liquid medicine, such as pills, is permitted.

Sunday. It is well to note that when a person has allowed this time to pass without receiving holy communion, he is still obliged to fulfil the obligation as soon as possible. Only a worthy communion satisfies the law of the annual reception of the Holy Eucharist.

Conclusion

In the Holy Eucharist we have the supreme and abiding proof of the immeasurable love of Jesus Christ for the members of His Mystical Body, the Church. Because we are very dear to Him, He deigns to come down from heaven at the bidding of the priest, to be offered in sacrifice to His heavenly Father, to become the spiritual nourishment of our souls, to abide on our altars, strengthening and consoling us by His presence. In return for this proof of His undying affection He asks our generous, whole-hearted love. This love we can best manifest by assisting devoutly at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, every day if possible, by frequently and fervently receiving holy communion, and by fostering a strong and practical devotion toward our Saviour in His sacramental presence on our altars. It is the ardent hope of the author of this little pamphlet that all who read it will be stimulated to an increase of true piety towards Him Who has verified in a wonderful manner through the greatest of His sacraments His consoling assurance: "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world".

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STUDY OUTLINE
THE HOLY EUCHARIST

Introduction

The Holy Eucharist, by which the soul is spiritually nourished, is the most excellent of the sacraments—first, because it contains Christ Himself; second, because it is a sacrifice as well as a sacrament. The Holy Eucharist is the very centre of the liturgical and devotional life of the Catholic Church.

The Real Presence

(a) The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus Christ is truly, really and substantially present in the Holy Eucharist. This same doctrine is held by the non-Catholic Eastern churches, but is denied by Protestants, who believe that this sacrament as Christ instituted it was merely bread and wine as a sign of His body and blood.

The doctrine of the Real Presence is based on the words of Christ Himself who promised, about a year before His death, that He would give His own flesh and blood for the spiritual nourishment of His followers (*John,* VI, 48-59), and at the Last Supper clearly stated that He was giving His apostles His own body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine (*Matthew,* XXVI, 26-38). Moreover, on this latter occasion our Lord gave the apostles and their successsors in the priesthood the power to do the same thing that He had done—that is, to change bread and wine into His body and blood (*Luke,* XXII, 19). The doctrine of the Real Presence was universally held by Christians from the very beginning; not until the eleventh century did any one claiming to be a Christian doubt it.

(b) Christ becomes present in the Holy Eucharist by *transubstantiation*—that is, by the change of the entire *substance* of bread (or wine) into His body (or blood). The *accidents,* or appearances, of the bread and wine remain unchanged, sustained in being by the power of God, and continuing to act and to be acted upon in the same manner as they did before the change took place. Our Lord is present with His body, blood, soul and divinity under each consecrated species and under every part of each species. He remains as long as the appearance of bread (or wine) remain.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

(a) The rite by which the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ is a true sacrifice, since it is the repetition of the rite performed by our Lord at the Last Supper, when He

offered His body and blood sacrificially to His Father, as is evident from His own words (*Luke,* XXII, 19—*Matthew,* XXVI, 28). The constant tradition of the Church also substantiates the doctrine that the Mass is a sacrifice. However, the Mass is not independent of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, but depends for its efficacy on the latter and applies to individual souls the merits and satisfactions which our Saviour acquired for men by His passion and death. Hence, the Mass is the *renewal* of the sacrifice of the cross. The most important part of the Mass occurs at the consecration, when the priest changes the bread and wine into our Lord's body and blood, and thus by a mystic immolation offers again to God the same Victim that was once slain on Calvary. The priest's communion is also an important part of the Mass. To emphasize the dignity of the holy sacrifice, the Church has enhanced it with prayers and ceremonies. Mass is celebrated in many languages and rites.

(b) The Mass has four effects:—1. It gives praise to God; 2. It thanks Him for His past favors; 3. It obtains from God more favors; 4. It makes atonement to God for sin and for the punishment due to sin. All the living and the souls in purgatory can be benefited by the Mass. The measure of the fruits of the Mass depends on the good pleasure of the Almighty and on the dispositions of the recipients and of those who offer the Mass.

The Holy Eucharist as a Sacrament

(a) The matter for the consecration of the Holy Eucharist is wheaten bread and grape wine. For *validity,* the bread may be either leavened or unleavened. The form of this sacrament is the words of Christ, repeated by the priest: "This is my body. . . . This is my blood." . . . After consecration the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is composed of the body and blood of Christ and the sacred species. The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in Catholic churches not only for the communion of the sick, but also as an object of devotion for the faithful.

(b) The effects of a worthy holy communion are an increase of sanctifying grace and a special sacramental grace which is an intimate union with Christ. From this union many benefits accrue to the communicant, such as the grace to love God more ardently, preservation from sin, the remission of venial sins, a title to a glorious resurrection, and union with the other members of the Church. In exceptional cases, holy communion can even restore a sinner to the state of grace. One person can transfer to another the benefits of the prayers he recites at the time of holy communion, but not the direct *sacramental* effects of his communion.

(c) It is evident from the tradition and the practice of the Church that Christ did not command that Holy Eucharist should be received by the faithful under the species of *both* bread and wine. Consequently, Church legislation on this matter has varied according to time and place. Nowadays, in the Latin rite holy communion is given to the faithful under the species of bread only, while in the Oriental rites it is usually administered under the species of both bread and wine.

The Minister, the Recipient and the Necessity of the Holy Eucharist

(a) Only a priest or a bishop can *validly* consecrate the Holy Eucharist, and celebrate the holy sacrifice of the Mass. To celebrate Mass *lawfully,* the minister must be in the state of grace and be recognized by the Church as a clergyman in good standing. Under certain circumstances a deacon may administer holy communion; in very extraordinary cases even a lay person may give the Holy Eucharist to himself or to others. When a priest celebrates Mass he is officiating as the representative of the faithful, who accordingly truly join in the offering of the holy sacrifice.

(b) To receive holy communion *validly,* a person must be baptized. To receive the Holy Eucharist *fruitfully* one must ordinarily be in the state of grace; but in certain extraordinary circumstances a person in mortal sin can be restored to the friendship of God by holy communion. By the law of God or of the Church one who has committed mortal sin is obliged to receive the sacrament of Penance before partaking of the Holy Eucharist. Baptized children who have not yet attained the use of reason can receive the Holy Eucharist validly and fruitfully, though in the Latin rite this is not permitted. By ecclesiastical legislation a person must fast from midnight before receiving holy communion. The Church grants certain exceptions and dispensations from this law.

(c) The reception of the Holy Eucharist is not necessary as a *means* to salvation, but is obligatory, by divine and ecclesiastical *law,* on all who have attained the use of reason. This law obliges Catholics to receive holy communion when they are in danger of death, and also at least once a year, during the Easter season.

Conclusion

The Holy Eucharist is an extraordinary proof of Christ's love for the members of His Church. In return for this great gift we should manifest our love for our Blessed Saviour by a practical and constant devotion to the Holy Eucharist.

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PENANCE

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Introduction

"THY sins are forgiven thee." The Gospels mention several occasions on which these or similar words were spoken by Jesus Christ to some poor sinner who implored His mercy. Mary Magdalen (*Luke,* VII, 48), the palsied man (*Matthew,* IX, 2), the penitent thief on the cross (*Luke,* XXIII, 43) —these, and doubtless many others of whom the Scriptures make no mention, heard from the lips of the Son of God the consoling assurance that they were freed from the bondage of sin and restored to the friendship of their heavenly Father.

In view of the tender compassion of our loving Saviour we should naturally expect that He would provide a means whereby sinners, at all times and in all places, could be assured of pardon, as were those who knelt before Him when He dwelt among men. He did indeed institute Baptism to take away the sins of those who have not yet been incorporated into His Mystical Body, the Church. Yet, He foresaw that even after Baptism some would sin grievously. His great mercy would seem to demand that for these another sacrament of forgiveness should be instituted. Now, according to the teachings of the Catholic Church such a sacrament of reconciliation has been given us by our Lord—the sacrament of Penance. Not infrequently persons who are not of the Catholic faith denounce this sacrament as an oppressive burden imposed on Catholics by the tyranny of their ecclesiastical superiors. Most of these attacks arise from ignorance of the historical facts concerning Penance and from a misunderstanding of its nature and the method of its administration. The purpose of this pamphlet is to furnish for the benefit of Catholics and non-Catholics alike a clear and adequate idea of the most important features of this sacrament according to the authoritative teachings of the Catholic Church and the principles of Catholic theology.

PENANCE

BY REVEREND FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

THE HISTORY OF PENANCE

The Promise of the Power to Forgive Sin

The eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel relates that about a year before His death Christ addressed His apostles in these words: "Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven" (*Matthew,* XVIII, 18). Shortly before, our Lord had spoken to St. Peter in similar words, but with the significant promise prefixed: "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (*Matthew,* XVI, 19).

Evidently the power of "binding and loosing" which Christ promised to His chosen disciples, and in particular to St. Peter, must have been some extraordinary power, since He introduced the promise made to the group with the phrase: "Amen I say to you"—a phrase indicating that the words which follow are very solemn and important. The scope of this power can be deduced from the promise made to St. Peter, in which it is apparent that the power of binding and loosing flows from the possession of "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." The expression "to possess the keys" of a kingdom or city means "to have supreme authority" over those who dwell there. Evidently, therefore, the Son of God promised to give Peter the sovereign power of ruling His kingdom of heaven—that is, the Church, as the way to the happiness of eternal life. By virtue of this supreme authority Peter

would be able to bind men to the obligations that would aid them to attain everlasting happiness and to loose them from impediments to this eternal goal, the chief of which is sin. Since the power of binding and loosing had this meaning in the promise made by Christ to Peter, we logically infer that it had the same meaning in the promise made to all the apostles, although their power would naturally be subordinate to the sovereign power of Peter. Thus, we can reasonably find implied in the two passages of Holy Scripture with which we are concerned a solemn promise made by the God of truth that He would confer on the first bishops of His Church the power to forgive sin.

Some non-Catholic critics object to this process of reasoning on the score that the expression "to bind and to loose" was a Hebrew idiom meaning only "to declare what is right and what is wrong," and that all that Christ promised His apostles was the power to explain what is lawful and what is unlawful according to the Christian standards of morality. However, even admitting that the phrase "to bind and to loose" has the meaning these opponents ascribe to it, our argument is not thereby rendered worthless. It must be remembered that Christ assured the apostles their power to bind and to loose would be *ratified* in heaven—in other words, would partake of the efficacy of God's own power to declare what is right and what is wrong. The power of God to proclaim the moral law connotes the right to impose obligations on men and the power to pardon those who have transgressed His law. Therefore, the power which Christ wishes His apostles to possess must have been of the same nature.

Accordingly, we have good reason to believe that Christ promised the apostles the power to forgive sin on the occasions we have described, about a year before His death. If this be the case, He must have subsequently given them this power, since He is the divine Truth itself. Since the powers given by Christ to the apostles for the common good of mankind were to be transmitted to their successors, the power to forgive sin must still be included in the priestly

functions of those who are the lawful successors of the apostles in the Church of Christ.

We do not claim that the apostles perceived the full significance of Christ's words when He made this great promise. Yet, these words certainly prepared them for a later occasion when our Lord clearly and explicitly declared them the possessors of the power to free their fellow-men from the shackles of sin.

The Bestowal of the Power

On the afternoon of the first Easter Sunday, while the apostles were gathered in a room of one of the houses in Jerusalem, with the doors closed and locked for fear of the Jews who had put their Master to death, our Saviour suddenly appeared in their midst. Earlier in the day they had heard reports that He had returned to life and had even showed Himself to some of the faithful women. Yet doubt and anxiety filled their souls until they actually saw Him in all the majesty and beauty of His glorified humanity. While they knelt around Him, speechless with joy, He greeted them with the loving salutation: "Peace be to you." Then He said: "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you." Then He breathed upon them, and continued: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (*John*, XX, 21-23).

Could Christ declare in more clear and more simple language the fact that He was then giving the apostles the power to forgive sin? Yet, strange to say, Protestants generally see in these words nothing more than a commission given to the apostles to preach to men that their sins will no longer be imputed to them by God if they have faith. Surely this is an utterly unjustifiable distortion of a self-evident statement. Besides being supported by the literal sense of the words, the Catholic interpretation of this passage is upheld by the statement which our Lord had just made: "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you." The Father had sent His only-begotten Son to free men from their sins. The commission

He gave the apostles must have been directed to the same end. Moreover, the solemn words: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," accompanied by the act of breathing on the apostles to symbolize the coming of the Holy Spirit, indicate the conferring of some extraordinary supernatural power, far greater than a simple delegation to preach. Finally, it is worthy of note that the Greek word used in the original Gospel text of this passage for "forgive" (ἀφῆτε) is a form of the very same verb that the inspired writers use in other passages to signify the remission of sin by Christ Himself—for example, in the case of Mary Magdalen (*Luke,* VII, 48) and the palsied man (*Matthew,* IX, 2). Clearly then, the power He was giving the apostles was of the same nature that He Himself exercised as the "Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world."

It must be evident to every fair-minded person that the only reasonable meaning of the scriptural passage we are considering is that Christ conferred on his apostles—and consequently also on their successors in the ministry—a true power to forgive sin.

The Forgiveness of Sins in the Early Church

The statements of writers who lived in the early centuries of the Christian era and the consistent practice of the Church since its establishment abundantly testify that bishops and priests were always regarded as able to forgive sins committed after Baptism by virtue of a divine power transmitted to them from Christ through the apostles. Thus, a treatise entitled *The Shepherd of Hermas,* dating from about the year 140 A.D., develops at great length the efficacy and the necessity of penance performed with a view to receiving pardon through the Church's ministrations by those who sin after Baptism. Tertullian, a priest of Carthage about the year 200, while still a Catholic * wrote a disquisition "On Penance," in which he makes statements such as: "If you shrink from confession, think of hell, which confession extinguishes for

* Tertullian afterward became a Montanist, and denied the power of the Church to forgive certain grievous sins. But he always admitted that some sins can be forgiven by priests and bishops.

you," and "Since you know that after the first protection against hell given through Christ's Baptism, there is still in confession a second help, why do you defer your salvation?" (*On Penance,* Chapter 12). Origen, who died in 254, wrote in one of his homilies that the truly repentant sinner can obtain pardon "if he is not ashamed to confess his sins to the priest of the Lord" (*Homily in Leviticus,* 2, 4). St. Cyprian, who died as a martyr in 258, exhorted sinners to confess their transgressions "while he that sinned is still in this world, while his confession can be heard, while satisfaction and pardon given by the priests are still acceptable to God" (*On the Fallen,* Chapter 29).

These are but a few of the many citations from the ancient Christian writers that could be quoted to prove that from earliest times it was explicitly acknowledged that Christ gave to His Church the power to forgive the sins of baptized persons, and that this power is exercised through the ministry of bishops and priests.

Penance a Sacrament

A sacrament of the New Law is an external sign established by Jesus Christ possessing the power to confer grace. That the ceremony by which sins committed after Baptism are forgiven is a sacrament is proved both from an analysis of the rite itself and from the uninterrupted tradition of the Church. It is an external sign, because it postulates on the part of the recipient a confession of his sins and an acknowledgment of sorrow, and on the part of the priest the pronouncing of the words of absolution—a series of external acts. It possesses the power to confer grace from the very fact that it can remit sin, for sin is remitted only by the infusion of grace. It was established by Christ, as is evident from the Gospel narrative (quoted above) of His commission to the apostles on the first Easter Sunday.

The tradition of the Church from the earliest times has placed Penance among the Christian sacraments. The ancient writers did not indeed explicitly call this rite a sacra-

ment, for the word "sacrament" had not as yet received its present precise meaning. In fact, until the twelfth century, there was no word to designate exclusively the seven divinely established rites that we call sacraments. The early Fathers taught that the power to forgive sins was given to the Church by Christ and that the ceremony by which it is exercised is in the same category as the rite of Baptism—which is the same as calling Penance a sacrament. Thus, Tertullian calls Baptism and Penance "the two planks after spiritual shipwreck" (*On Penance,* Chapter 12). St. Jerome says: "Penance imitates the grace of Baptism by the unspeakable mercy of the Saviour" (*Dialogue against the Pelagians,* I, 33).

Before the rise of Protestantism in the sixteenth century there was no attack of any consequence on the claim of the Catholic Church to possess the power to forgive sin. Even those who separated themselves from Catholic unity, like the Orthodox Eastern Christians, generally retained the sacrament of Penance. However, the founders of Protestantism, especially Luther and Calvin, excluded this sacrament from their creed and practice. They are followed in this by the majority of present-day Protestants. The Anglican Book of Common Prayer does indeed recommend the confession of sins, especially by those who have transgressed grievously; but the twenty-fifth of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican and Episcopalian churches declares that Penance is not one of the sacraments instituted by Christ. However, some Catholic-minded members of these denominations now acknowledge Penance as a sacrament. In some of their parish churches the ministers hear confessions and give absolution in a manner similar to that practiced in the Catholic Church. Catholics believe that God will have regard for the sincerity and true compunction of heart of the good persons who confess their sins to these ministers. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church holds that Penance is not administered validly by Anglican and Episcopalian clergymen, because they have not received valid priestly ordination.

In the course of the centuries the sacrament of Penance

has been known by various titles, such as "the imposition of hands" (because in the early days the bishop imposed his hands on penitents when he absolved them), "reconciliation," "peace," and "communion" (because through this sacrament the sinner is restored to communion, or union, with the Church). At the present day "Confession" is a name frequently applied to this sacrament, though the confession of sins is in reality only one of its elements. "Penance" is the title officially used by the Church and by theologians.

QUALITIES AND EFFECTS OF PENANCE

The sacrament of Penance has three essential qualities—it is judicial, universal and necessary. We shall consider each of these qualities separately, and then describe the chief effects of this sacrament.

The Judicial Nature of Penance

For a scientific understanding of the sacrament of Penance one must realize that it is a *judicial* act—or, to use theological terminology, that it is administered "after the manner of a judgment." This means that the process by which a person submits his sins to the priest to have them forgiven through the sacrament of Penance is similar to the judicial process of civil law by which a person accused of a crime is tried with a view to establishing his guilt or innocence. Of course there are some points of difference between the two tribunals. The civil court can pass judgment only on external acts, while Penance judges also internal acts. The civil tribunal is concerned primarily with bringing the guilty to justice, while the tribunal of Penance has for its chief object the restoration of the guilty to God's friendship. However, in form the two are quite similar. To the defendant in the civil court corresponds the penitent in the sacrament; to the judge in the former corresponds the priest in the latter. In each there is an examination of the case by the judge, and for this purpose testimony is given in the civil tribunal by witnesses, in the sacrament by the penitent himself. The main point

of resemblance lies in the fact that the priest, like the civil judge, has the power to pass an *authoritative* sentence—that is, not a mere *petition* that the penitent may be pardoned by God, nor a mere *declaration* that he is unworthy of pardon, but an *effective decision* which is endorsed by the Almighty, that the sinner is either freed from his sins or sent away unforgiven.

The principal argument that the sacrament of Penance is of a judicial nature is found in the words of Christ: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." From these words it is evident that our Lord gave the ministers of Penance a two-fold power—either to forgive or to retain. Now, in order that the minister may reasonably judge who is worthy of forgiveness and who is unworthy, he must submit the conscience of the penitent to a strict and complete examination, just as a judge examines the case of a man accused of a civil crime. Moreover, from these same words of Christ it can be seen that the priest in the tribunal of Penance passes an *authoritative* sentence, effective in the sight of God. For, our Lord declared that whatever sins would be remitted or retained by the priest *would be* remitted or retained—that is, by God Himself. Now surely, a sentence that is ratified by the Almighty Himself is authoritative. Hence, Catholics rightly claim the sacrament of Penance is judicial.

This aspect of the sacrament of Penance—its judicial nature—will be referred to frequently in the succeeding pages, since it is the basis of a number of doctrines—for example, that only sins committed *after Baptism* can be forgiven by Penance, and that the minister of this sacrament must have *jurisdiction* to absolve validly.

Universality of Penance

By the *universality* of Penance we mean that all sins committed after Baptism, no matter how grievous or numerous they may be, can be forgiven by the power of this sacrament. That Penance is universal in this sense is proved by the

words which Christ spoke on the occasions when He promised the apostles the power to remit sins, and when He actually gave it. The Son of God made no restrictions to the extent of this power. He did not say: "Certain things you may bind, certain things you may loose," but "Whatsoever you shall bind . . . whatsoever you shall loose." He did not say: "The sins you shall forgive to the less heinous sinners will be forgiven," but "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven." The mercy of His Sacred Heart was extended to all sinners without exception. He died for all, and therefore He willed the benefits of His death to be offered to all, even to the most vicious and most obdurate.

In the early centuries there were certain heretics—the Montanists and the Novatians in particular—who taught that certain grievous sins, such as murder and idolatry, cannot be forgiven by the sacrament of Penance. However, the true doctrine was strenuously propounded and defended by the orthodox bishops and writers, and especially by the Popes. To quote but two statements of the many that could be given—St. Augustine wrote: "There are some who said that penance was not to be allowed for certain sins; and they were excluded from the Church, being heretics" (*Sermon* 352, n. 3). St. Pacian said, "He (Christ) excepted nothing at all. He said, 'Whatsoever' " (*Epistle* 3, n. 12). Such sayings illustrate the constant doctrine of the Catholic Church regarding the extent of her power to forgive sins through the sacrament of Penance.

In the early Church, it is true, those who had transgressed God's law flagrantly were usually compelled to do penance for a long period of time before receiving absolution. Indeed, it would seem that some bishops refused sacramental absolution to certain sinners even at the hour of death—particularly to those who had previously received Penance for grave sins and later committed the same sins again.*

* According to some historians these relapsed sinners were refused only *public* restitution to good standing in the Church, but were granted *private* sacramental absolution from their sins on their death-bed.

However, the restricted use of the power to forgive sins, or the refusal to use this power in certain cases, in no wise proves that the Church did not possess this power in its fullest degree, or was not conscious of possessing it. In those days the bishops considered a measure of severity in the granting of absolution an effective means to inspire the faithful with a horror for sin. Moreover, even when absolution was refused to a sinner, either permanently or for a time, he could always recover the state of grace by making an act of perfect contrition with the desire of receiving the sacrament of Penance.

Necessity of Penance

When we say that Penance is necessary we mean that no mortal sin committed by a baptized person can be forgiven independently of this sacrament. That Penance is endowed with this quality is proved from the words of Christ: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." The important part of this text, as regards the point we are now considering, is the second clause—"Whose sins you shall retain, etc." For, if a member of the Church who had committed a mortal sin could receive God's forgiveness entirely independently of the pardoning power given by Christ to the ministers of His Church, then the power to retain sins would be utterly useless—and surely Christ would not have conferred a power of this sort on His apostles and their successors. We can illustrate this by an example. Let us suppose that a prison-warden were given the key to the gate of the prison by the governor, with the words: "Whatever prisoners you release will be allowed to have their freedom, and whatever prisoners you order retained, will be held in jail"—but in the meantime there is another door in the prison which the prisoners can use at will independently of the warden. As is evident, his power to keep the prisoners in jail would be futile, and the governor's commission would be meaningless. Such a commission, to have any value, implies that the release of any prisoner must depend on the exercise of the warden's power as on

a necessary means. Therefore, from Christ's commission to His apostles we must conclude that the exercise of the power to forgive sins by them or by their successors through the sacrament of Penance is a necessary means for the release of any baptized person from mortal sin. If some means entirely unrelated to Penance were available to sinners, they would be like prisoners leaving the side door of the prison and flaunting the warden.

We limit the necessity of Penance to sins committed *after Baptism,* because sins committed by an unbaptized person are remitted by Baptism. Even one who would receive Baptism unworthily, and consequently would not obtain the pardon of his sins at the time, would have them remitted later, not by confessing them, but by placing the necessary dispositions for the "revival" of Baptism. For Penance is "after the manner of a judgment," and in a judgment only those crimes that have been committed by persons under the jurisdiction of the court can be tried. Now, it is only by Baptism that one comes under the jurisdiction of the Church. Consequently, only sins committed by a baptized person can and must be submitted to the tribunal of Penance.

However, we know that one who has committed mortal sin can obtain pardon and restoration to the state of grace if he makes an act of love of God based on the goodness of the Almighty as He is in Himself. The same is true of an act of perfect contrition which is sorrow for sin including such love of God as we have just described. Our Lord has said: "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him" (*John,* XIV, 21). From this we conclude that when we ascribe necessity to the sacrament of Penance we mean that the reception of this sacrament is necessary for the *final and judicial* remission of sins committed after Baptism, though not for their removal from the soul. Consequently, one who has had his mortal sins taken from his soul by an act of divine love or of perfect contrition is still obliged to confess them to receive their *judicial* remission. Hence, he must have the intention of confessing them in the tribunal of Penance when

he makes his act of love or contrition, otherwise they will not be forgiven. However, an *implicit* intention, such as is necessarily contained in every true act of contrition or love of God, is enough. Thus, a Protestant who is sincerely convinced that his religion is true can obtain the pardon of his mortal sins by perfect contrition. Although he has no *explicit* desire of Penance—in which he does not believe—he has a sufficient *implicit* desire of this sacrament in his general intention of fulfilling in future whatever God has commanded.

The sacrament of Penance is not necessary for the forgiveness of venial sins, which do not deprive the soul of the grace of God. These sins can be forgiven by an act of contrition without the sacrament. Probably imperfect contrition suffices —perhaps even that kind of contrition, called virtual contrition, which is implicitly present in an act of virtue opposed to the particular sins which one has committed. Thus, one who has been guilty of a slight act of irreverence in church may receive the pardon of this venial sin by being very devout and reverential the next time he goes to church, even though he does not think of his previous fault. However, it is well to tell even venial sins in the tribunal of Penance, for they are remitted more surely and more effectively by the power of the sacrament.

The Effects of Penance

The primary effect of the sacrament of Penance is the forgiveness of the penitent's sins. All the mortal sins that he may have on his soul are forgiven if the sinner approaches the sacred tribunal with the necessary dispositions. Indeed, it is impossible for one mortal sin to be forgiven while others remain on the soul. All must be forgiven or none is forgiven. Consequently, it is absolutely necessary that the penitent have contrition for *all* his mortal sins, even for any he may have forgotten. It is different with venial sins. A person may be sorry for some of his venial sins but not for others. In such a case the former are forgiven, while the latter remain on his soul.

Since the remission of sin is effected by the infusion of

supernatural grace, the worthy recipient of this sacrament obtains a measure of grace corresponding to the perfection of the dispositions of soul with which he approaches the sacred tribunal. This grace is twofold—sanctifying and sacramental. Sanctifying grace is a created participation of God's own nature. The sacramental grace of Penance is a claim to the special divine helps necessary to retain the spirit of compunction for past sins and to avoid future sins.

With sanctifying grace the soul also receives the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and—according to the more common view of theologians—the infused moral virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. Moreover, one who receives the forgiveness of mortal sin recovers the supernatural merits he possessed before falling into sin. This is called the *revival of merits.* The great mercy of God is shown in the fact that a sin once forgiven never returns to the soul—even though subsequently the person may fall again, and be eternally lost. But the value of one's good deeds performed in the state of grace is restored as often as he returns to God's friendship, even though his falls and conversions be numerous.

One who receives Penance in the state of grace receives an increase of sanctifying grace and of the aforesaid virtues and gifts. He also is aided to serve God more faithfully in future.

The debt of *eternal* punishment, due to every unforgiven mortal sin, is always taken away with the sin itself. But even after the guilt of any actual sin, whether mortal or venial, has been remitted, there may still remain a debt of *temporal* punishment, the payment of which God will demand either in this life or in purgatory. A portion of this debt is condoned when a person receives the sacrament of Penance worthily, especially by the fulfilment of the sacramental satisfaction, or penance.

The Council of Trent mentions as another effect that sometimes follows a good confession "peace and serenity of con-

science with exceeding consolation of spirit." Finally, the sacrament of Penance confers great benefits on society by fostering respect for authority, obedience to civil law, and the strict observance of the principles of justice.

THE ELEMENTS OF PENANCE

In every sacrament Catholic theologians distinguish two essential parts known as matter and form. The matter is the indetermined element—usually a material object or a human action. The form is the element that determines the precise purpose of the sacramental rite, and is composed of words spoken by the person who administers the sacrament. The form of Penance, as is evident, is the absolution pronounced by the priest.

In most of the sacraments, including Penance, the matter is twofold—remote and proximate. By the remote matter is meant something which exists previous to the conferring of the sacrament, and which is used in some way in its administration—for example, water for Baptism. By the proximate matter is meant, in general, a human action concerned with the remote matter—for example, the pouring of the water in the act of baptizing. Now, the remote matter of Penance consists of the sins which the penitent submits to the priest. Only sins committed after Baptism can be the matter of this sacrament, because it is essentially judicial, and therefore its power extends only to those sins committed by persons subject to the jurisdiction of the Church through the reception of Baptism. Both mortal and venial sins can constitute the remote matter of Penance—the former being necessary matter, until they have been explicitly confessed and forgiven,* the latter being free, or non-obligatory, matter. Even sins confessed and forgiven in a previous reception of Penance

* Mortal sins forgiven by an act of divine love or of perfect contrition, or previously forgiven in the sacrament of Penance without having been explicitly confessed—for example, if they were forgotten—remain necessary matter of this sacrament until the sinner has duly confessed them and received sacramental absolution.

can repeatedly form sufficient matter for its administration, because one can again confess them, be sorry for them, and through absolution receive that measure of grace that would have remitted them if they were still on his soul.

It is a disputed question among Catholic theologians what constitutes the proximate matter of Penance. Some find the proximate matter as well as the form in the words of the priestly absolution. These words, they say, are the form of the sacrament in as far as they express the forgiveness of sins; they are the proximate matter in as far as they are external human actions. However, the more common theological view is that the proximate matter of Penance consists of the three acts of the penitent—confession, contrition, satisfaction—while the absolution is only the form.

At any rate, all admit that for the proper administration of Penance these four elements—confession, contrition, satisfaction and absolution—must be present. We shall therefore consider separately each of these four elements of this great sacrament.

Confession

One of the familiar objections urged by non-Catholics against Catholic doctrine and practice is that the Church obliges her members, under pain of eternal damnation, to perform a very arduous task which Christ Himself never commanded—that is, to confess their sins to a priest. We reply that while there is no scriptural passage stating that Christ *explicitly* imposed the obligation of confession, the words of our Lord when He instituted Penance undoubtedly contain such a command *implicitly*. For He empowered the apostles and their successors either to forgive or to retain sins. Now, in order to exercise this twofold power reasonably the priest must know what sins the penitent has committed, and what are his present dispositions. If the governor of a state delegated one of his assistants to visit the prison and to pardon some of the prisoners and to refuse pardon to others, leaving it to the judgment of this assistant to choose who should be pardoned and who should not, this man could not

use his power properly unless he first investigated the record of each prisoner and only then formed his decision. So too, the priest cannot judiciously use the great power of forgiving or retaining sins until he knows what evil the penitent has done and his attitude of mind and heart toward his past sins and his future conduct. Such knowledge can be obtained only from the penitent's own honest and complete confession.

Therefore the Bible does prove conclusively that Christ commanded the confession of sin; and the practice of the Church confirms it. From the earliest centuries confession has been regarded by Catholics as an obligation imposed by our Lord Himself on all who sin grievously after Baptism. In ancient times sinners frequently confessed their guilt publicly, before the entire congregation.

In making his confession a person must tell all his mortal sins, if he has committed any, which have not yet been explicitly confessed and forgiven. This includes sins which have been properly confessed previously but which the priest refused to forgive, sins forgiven outside the sacrament by perfect contrition, and sins forgotten in a previous confession. These last have been forgiven by the absolution of the priest (provided that the person's contrition extended to them in a general way), but since they were not judicially examined by the divinely commissioned judge, they were only *indirectly* forgiven. Consequently, if the penitent remembers them afterward he must explicitly confess them the next time he goes to confession. However when he remembers these sins he is not obliged to anticipate the regular time for his next confession, nor is he in the meantime deterred by them from Holy Communion.

In confessing mortal sins a person must tell their specific nature and the number of times he committed each different kind of sin. For, just as in a criminal court the judge must know whether a person is charged with murder or with forgery, whether he is accused of stealing five dollars or ten thousand dollars, so in the tribunal of Penance the priest must know whether the penitent has sinned by blasphemy or

intemperance, whether he has sinned once or twenty times. From the same principle it follows that any circumstance that changes the nature of a sin—that is, that makes a sin of one kind a sin of another kind also—must be confessed. Thus, one who has stolen church money is obliged to confess not only that he has taken money that did not belong to him but also that he took it from the church, because this latter feature adds to his sin of theft a sin of sacrilege.

When after due examination one cannot tell the exact number of times he has committed a certain kind of mortal sin he should give the number approximately, as nearly as possible. When one has to confess a serious habitual sin extending over a considerable period of time, it is best for him to tell how long the habit has continued and to mention the average frequency of his lapses each week or month.

Venial sins need not be confessed. If they are told their specific nature should be mentioned, though their number need not be stated. One who has committed only slight faults since his last confession is advised to include some more serious transgressions of his past life in order the more surely to have the requisite sorrow and purpose of amendment.

It sometimes happens that a person is unable to confess his mortal sins in detail, yet is in need of the immediate reception of Penance. Thus, a regiment of soldiers is about to go into battle and hundreds of them wish to receive the sacrament of Penance. There is no time for them to confess individually. In such circumstances, confession in a general form—that is, the mere acknowledgment of having committed sin—suffices for the valid and fruitful reception of Penance, even in the case of those whose souls are burdened with mortal sin. In the circumstances described the chaplain could announce: "Let all those who desire to receive the sacrament of Penance raise their hands." The very fact that a man raised his hand would be an acknowledgment that he had sinned, and in such extraordinary circumstances we are sure that God would consider this as a sufficient confession for the recep-

tion of Penance. Accordingly, the chaplain would direct the soldiers to make an act of contrition aloud, and then give them sacramental absolution. Of course, as was stated above, any mortal sins forgiven in this manner must be confessed explicitly by the individual at the next normal reception of Penance.

If a penitent consciously and deliberately conceals a mortal sin in confession, the sacrament is null and void, and he is guilty of a new sin of sacrilege. One who has been so unfortunate as to make a bad confession or a series of bad confessions, in order to rectify the evil is obliged to confess, not only the concealed sin, but also all the mortal sins committed since his last good confession—including those told in his invalid confessions—as well as the number of times he has received the sacraments unworthily. Besides being grievously sinful it is most foolish to conceal a sin in confession. The priest is bound by the strictest law of secrecy *never* to reveal any sin a person has confessed, and *never* to allow his conduct toward a penitent outside the confessional to be effected by any matter of confession he has heard in the sacred tribunal.

Before going to confession a person must examine his conscience—that is, spend a reasonable amount of time in recalling and classifying his sins, so that he will be prepared to tell them correctly and completely. Then the priest will not have to go through a lengthy process of cross-examination in order to find out the matter of confession. When one has made his examination of conscience he should make a fervent act of contrition, the efficacy of which will then accompany his confession, so that even if he is wholly distracted when making his act of contrition in the confessional the priest's absolution will remit his sins. A prayer for light and strength should be said before this examination of conscience and act of contrition.

Non-Catholics and even prospective converts are apt to shudder at the thought of confession as something terribly difficult and distasteful. But as Catholics know, this impres-

sion is entirely false. Confession is a source of great consolation and an excellent means of obtaining advice and encouragement in the battle of life.

Contrition

It stands to reason that one who has turned away from God by sin cannot hope to be pardoned unless he turns back to his heavenly Father by repentance. The act by which a person repents of his sins is called contrition. The obligation of sinners to make an act of contrition before they can be pardoned is frequently found in Sacred Scripture. Thus, our Lord said: "Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish" (*Luke,* XIII, 3). And Saint Peter bade the Jews, who had slain our Lord: "Be penitent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (*Acts,* III, 19).

Contrition, to be effective, must be an interior disposition, and not merely an external manifestation of repentance. It need not be felt emotionally, although sometimes it does produce emotional grief. Essentially it consists of an act of the will, deploring and detesting one's own sins in the past, and resolving to avoid sin in future.

Contrition must be supernatural—that is based on a motive known through faith and not on a merely natural motive. One who would repent of his sins because they injured his health or because they rendered him liable to punishment by the civil law would not be doing anything wrong, but he would not be performing an act that would help him positively toward regaining God's grace. Even a person who is sorry for his sins because sin is an offense against God as He is known merely through the light of reason is not making an act that is in any way effective toward obtaining God's pardon. For man is ordained to a *supernatural* destiny, the possession of God in a manner beyond all the natural faculties and powers of the human soul, and to attain to this sublime goal he must have the *supernatural* quality of sanctifying grace. Consequently, only *supernatural* acts will

positively aid toward the acquisition of sanctifying grace and the attainment of eternal happiness. Now, the basis of every supernatural act must be some revealed truth known through faith.

There are various supernatural motives known through faith which can serve as the basis of true and efficacious contrition. Thus, one can be contrite because sin is opposed to the goodness of God as He is in Himself, manifested to us by revelation; or because sin is an act of ingratitude toward our chief Benefactor; or because sin caused the sufferings of our Saviour; or because sin is so hateful in comparison to the beauty of supernatural virtue; or because sin makes the sinner liable to God's punishments, made known to us among the doctrines of faith. The first of these types of contrition is called *perfect contrition.* It contains an act of the highest kind of love of God, divine charity. For when one rejects sin as opposed to the goodness of God as He is in Himself, he necessarily makes an act of love of God on account of His intrinsic divine goodness. Such an act, as we stated previously, will immediately obtain for a sinner the pardon of his mortal sins and the restoration of the life of grace, although he has the obligation of receiving Penance if he is baptized, and Baptism if he is unbaptized.* The other types of contrition are known as *imperfect contrition,* or *attrition.* They do not procure pardon for one in mortal sin outside the sacraments of Baptism and Penance.**

To receive Penance worthily it suffices that one have any type of supernatural contrition, provided it extends to all mortal sins. One need not be sorry for his venial sins to have mortal sins forgiven. If a person has only venial sins

*It is important to note that an act of perfect contrition procures the remission of mortal sin whenever it is made, and not merely when one is in danger of death or when one cannot get to confession. Moreover, it is not necessary that the sinner have the intention of going to confession as soon as possible. It suffices that he intend to receive Penance when he is next obliged to do so.

** This is the ordinary rule. By exception, a sinner who receives one of the sacraments of the living will obtain the state of grace if he has attrition and is unconscious of his unworthiness.

to confess he must have contrition for at least one of them in order to receive absolution validly. Even venial sins are not forgiven by God until one repents of them. A person who through no fault of his own forgets to confess a mortal sin will receive pardon for it as long as his contrition is based on a supernatural motive applicable to all mortal sins—for example, love of God or fear of hell.

Contrition based on the fear of God's punishments, while not very noble, is not necessarily bad or hypocritical, as Martin Luther claimed. Christ Himself gave the admonition: "Fear Him that can destroy both soul and body in hell" (*Matthew,* X, 28). If God Himself has seen fit to threaten us with punishments in order to deter us from sin, it cannot be bad to make the fear of His punishments the motive for turning from sin. However, once a person has made an act of imperfect contrition from any supernatural motive, it is not difficult to make an act of perfect contrition by dwelling on God's infinite goodness and beauty. It must be noted that while perfect contrition is based on the consideration of the goodness of God as He is in Himself, it does not require one to exclude from his soul contrition based on personal motives, such as the fear of hell.

Contrition must be manifested externally for the reception of Penance, since it is (very probably) an essential part of the sacrament, and every sacrament is by its nature an external sign. Ordinarily the penitent fulfils this condition by reciting aloud, after confessing his sins, the formula of contrition given in the catechism. Strictly speaking any external manifestation of sorrow for sin is sufficient—even the fact that he confesses his sins with a view to receiving pardon.

True contrition must contain the purpose of amendment—that is, the intention of not offending God again, at least by mortal sin. This intention necessarily includes the resolution of avoiding the proximate occasions of mortal sin. One who has confessed only venial sins must have the intention also of avoiding at least one particular kind in future, or at very least of committing one kind of venial sin less frequently

than before. It is always best to make this purpose of amendment explicitly in conjunction with the act of contrition before entering the confessional, although it would seem that at least ordinarily it is sufficiently contained or implied in sorrow for past sins.

Satisfaction

Even after God has forgiven the guilt of sin, He sometimes demands the payment of a debt of temporal punishment by the pardoned sinner. Thus, King David, after he had repented of his sin of adultery, was assured by the prophet Nathan, speaking in the name of God: "The Lord hath taken away thy sin"; yet, the prophet added: "Nevertheless, the child that is born to thee shall surely die" (*IIKings,* XII, 13-14). It has been the constant belief of the Catholic Church that God has adopted a similar plan in the sacrament of Penance—that is, although He remits the guilt of sin to penitents who place the necessary conditions, yet He imposes a debt of temporal punishment for the forgiven sins, both mortal and venial. Although some of this debt is doubtless taken away in the very reception of the sacrament, some also remains to be expiated subsequently. Accordingly, it has been the constant practice of the Church to obligate the recipients of Penance to perform some works of atonement—called the sacramental satisfaction or penance—toward the payment of this debt of temporal punishment. In the early centuries the penance was often very severe, sometimes lasting several years. Moreover, it was customary in those times for the penitent to perform the penance before receiving absolution.

Nowadays the sacramental satisfaction is usually very light —ordinarily consisting of the recitation of some prayers. Moreover it is now customary for the priest to give absolution from the guilt of sin immediately after the confession and allow the penitent to perform the penance afterward. However, the satisfaction remains a part of the sacrament, so that a person has not fully received this sacrament until he has fulfilled his penance. The work of satisfaction enjoined by the priest is directed not only to take away some of the debt

of temporal punishment but also to serve as a safeguard against future relapses. Since however it does not contribute toward the remission of past sins, it is only an *integral,* not an *essential* part of the sacrament. For this reason, the priest can sometimes impart absolution without imposing any penance—for example, when the penitent is at the point of death.

To neglect deliberately the sacramental penance is a sin—a venial sin if the penance is light, a mortal sin if it is grave. Ordinarily a grave penance is imposed when mortal sins are confessed. If one intends to fulfil the penance and has true contrition when he receives the sacrament, his sins are forgiven and remain forgiven even though he afterward sins by not performing the penance.

Since the penances nowadays meted out in the sacred tribunal are probably inadequate in many cases to remit the entire debt of the punishment due to the penitent, it is advisable to supplement them by voluntary works of satisfaction. The three general headings under which satisfactory works are classified are prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Absolution

In giving sacramental absolution the priest first prays that God may pardon the penitent. Then he imparts absolution from any ecclesiastical censures the sinner may have incurred.* Finally he absolves the penitent from his sins, saying: "I absolve thee from thy sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." Then the priest is free to add—and most priests do add—a formula praying that all the penitent's future good works and sufferings may be efficacious toward satisfying for his debt of temporal punishment.

In cases of necessity, when time is an important factor, the priest simply says: "I absolve thee from all thy censures and sins, in the name of the Father, etc." According to the most

*There are three kinds of ecclesiastical censures—excommunication and interdict, which can be incurred by any baptized person, and suspension, which can be incurred only by a cleric.

common theological view, the words "I absolve thee from thy sins" are all that is strictly essential for the valid administration of Penance.

The words of absolution must be pronounced vocally by the priest while the penitent is actually present. The sacrament would not be administered if the priest wrote out the words and handed or sent the paper to the penitent.* The penitent is considered present to the priest when they are near enough to converse in a fairly moderate tone of voice. It is uncertain whether confession and absolution can be transmitted by telephone, though the negative opinion seems to be the stronger. If this were the only way of communicating with a penitent in an extraordinary case—for example, with an imprisoned miner—the priest could administer the sacrament conditionally, but would then help the man to make an act of perfect contrition.

THE MINISTER AND THE RECIPIENT OF PENANCE

The Minister

Christ gave the power of forgiving sins to the apostles to be used by themselves and to be transmitted to their successors. The successors of the apostles in the fullness of their priestly power are the bishops. Accordingly, bishops can administer the sacrament of Penance. In the early centuries it was generally the bishop who imparted sacramental absolution to sinners. However, from tradition and the practice of the Church we know that priests also can confer this sacrament. For many centuries one of the ceremonies in the rite of priestly ordination has been the imposition of the bishop's hands on the head of the candidate, with the words: "Receive thou the Holy Ghost. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained."

* In certain circumstances the penitent may write out his confession and hand it to the priest to be read in his (the penitent's) presence.

To the oft-repeated objection that only God can forgive sins Catholics reply that while it is true that only God can forgive sins *by His own power,* He can, if He wills, exercise that power *through human agents,* and even oblige men to make use of these human agents in order to be pardoned. Now, that is just what God does when He forgives sins through the priest, and stipulates that all baptized persons must confess to the priest to obtain the pardon of their grievous sins. In other words, the priest is only the *instrument* of God's power.

In order to administer Penance validly the priest must have, in addition to the power of Orders conferred at his ordination, the power of *jurisdiction*—that is, judicial authority over those whom he absolves. For this sacrament is conferred by a judicial process, and hence is subject to the general principle that the judge in every tribunal must have jurisdiction over those whose cases he is trying. Jurisdiction for the sacrament of Penance is called *ordinary,* if it is connected with the office which an ecclesiastic holds, and *delegated,* if it is acquired by deputation from one having ordinary jurisdiction. An example of the former is the jurisdiction of the bishop of a diocese or a parish priest; an example of the latter that of a curate. Ordinary jurisdiction is both local and personal—so that a bishop can hear the confessions of any one within his diocese, and of the residents of his diocese in any part of the world. The same is true of a pastor with respect to his parish and parishioners. Delegated jurisdiction is merely local—so that a curate could not hear confessions outside the diocese to which he belongs, even though the persons seeking his ministrations were residents of the parish in which he is stationed.

Sometimes certain grievous sins are reserved—that is, the power to forgive them is retained by higher ecclesiastical authorities. To give sacramental absolution from a sin of this nature the ordinary priest must obtain special jurisdiction from the person who has established the reservation—either the bishop of the diocese or the Pope. When a person is

in danger of death every priest, even though he be excommunicated or suspended, receives from the Church jurisdiction to absolve the dying Catholic from all sins and censures.

Apart from such extraordinary cases it seems quite probable that the priests of the heretical and schismatic Eastern churches (who have been validly ordained to the priesthood) have jurisdiction to administer Penance to the members of their denominations. For, since the vast majority of the Oriental Christians are not to blame in conscience for their separation from Catholic unity, the Church in her great love for souls allows their bishops and priests to retain and to exercise the jurisdiction necessary for the administration of Penance. Such is the opinion of a number of reliable theologians.

The Recipient

To receive the sacrament of Penance validly one must have sufficient matter for absolution—that is, one must have committed some actual sin after receiving Baptism. Accordingly, a child who has not yet attained to the use of reason could not be the recipient of Penance. Neither could an adult receive this sacrament immediately after being baptized, even though he had previously committed many sins.* However, given some lapse of time after Baptism, every one who has reached the age of reason can receive Penance, since without an extraordinary privilege—which was granted only to the Blessed Virgin—no one can remain for a long time free from at least slight venial sins.

A baptized person who has committed a mortal sin becomes a necessary subject of Penance until that sin has been properly confessed and absolved. However, he is not obliged to go to confession *as soon as possible*. By the law of Christ he is obliged to receive Penance at least before death. By the law of the Church he is obliged to confess within a year—

* But a convert to the faith who is rebaptized only *conditionally* on account of a previous Baptism that is probably valid, confesses his sins and receives *conditional* absolution.

the year being measured generally from Eastertide to Eastertide.* One who has only venial sins to confess, or only mortal sins previously confessed and forgiven, is not strictly obliged to go to confession at all, even annually or at the hour of death. However, even good Catholics of this type are advised to receive this sacrament at least once a month.

By the law of the Church certain persons are obliged to go to confession frequently. Thus, seminarians and religious are commanded to receive the sacrament of Penance weekly. To gain certain indulgences confession is prescribed as a necessary condition, although for daily communicants there is a special exception. But for the gaining of the extraordinary indulgence of the Jubilee confession is prescribed for all.

Conclusion

We can never thank God sufficiently for the great gift He has bestowed on us in the sacrament of Penance. We can best show our appreciation of this wonderful sacrament by receiving it frequently and fervently. As we said above, every practical Catholic should confess his sins at least once a month. To receive Penance twice a month is even better, for even though one has no mortal sins he will find in this sacrament a means of lessening his venial transgressions. Moreover, even a person who receives Holy Communion daily will find the reception of Penance twice a month quite sufficient for the progress of his spiritual life.

Those who receive this sacrament frequently should avoid two extremes. The one is to make their confessions the occasion for worry and scrupulosity. Our Lord intended Penance as a means of consolation, not an instrument of torture. The other extreme is to make the reception of Penance a matter of mere routine. This they can avoid by concentrating in each confession on a particular fault, making it the special object of their contrition and their purpose of amendment.

*But if one who has committed a mortal sin wishes to go to holy communion, he must first go to confession, even though he has made an act of perfect contrition.

It is well for those who go to confession frequently to have a regular confessor.

Each time a Catholic receives the sacrament of Penance he should picture himself as kneeling before Christ Himself to acknowledge his faults and to beg for pardon, and when the priest is pronouncing the words of absolution he should imagine that he is hearing from the lips of our Saviour the words that He spoke of old to penitent sinners: "Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace."

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STUDY OUTLINE

Introduction

Since our Saviour was so ready to forgive sinners while He dwelt on earth, we should naturally expect that He would provide a means of pardon for the sinners of future generations. Such a divinely established means of remitting sin, according to Catholic belief, is found in the sacrament of Penance.

The History of Penance

(a) From promises made by Christ to the apostles: "Whatsoever you shall bind . . . Whatsoever you shall loose, etc." (*Matthew,* XVIII, 18), and to St. Peter in particular: "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, etc." (*Matthew,* XVI, 19), we can reasonably infer that He intended to give them the power to forgive sins.

(b) Christ actually gave the power to forgive sins to the apostles on the day of His resurrection, when He said to them: "Whose sins you shall forgive, etc." (*John,* XX, 21-23). Since the powers He bestowed on the apostles as ministers of His Church were transmitted to their successors in the sacred ministry, this power to forgive sins is still possessed and exercised by the duly authorized ministers of the Catholic Church.

(c) From the earliest days of Christianity it has been believed that the Church possesses the power to forgive the sins of baptized persons through the ministry of bishops and priests.

(d) Since the rite by which sins are forgiven is an outward sign

of grace established by Christ, it is held by the Catholic Church to be a sacrament and is called Penance or "Confession." Most Protestant denominations refuse to acknowledge this sacrament.

Qualities and Effects of Penance

(a) The sacrament of Penance is administered as a judicial process, essentially involving an examination of the sins of the penitent and an authoritative sentence by the minister. This sacrament is also *universal*—that is, capable of remitting *all* sins committed after Baptism. It is *necessary*—that is, by the will of Christ all mortal sins committed after Baptism must be submitted to the tribunal of Penance to obtain their judicial pardon. Consequently, one who receives the pardon of his mortal sins by an act of perfect contrition must have at least the implicit intention of confessing them. Venial sins need not be confessed.

(b) Penance remits sin and infuses grace, both sanctifying and sacramental. This latter is a claim to actual graces necessary to retain the spirit of compunction and to avoid sin in future. The penitent also receives the infused virtues, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the remission of his eternal punishment and of some temporal punishment, the revival of previous merits, and peace of heart.

The Elements of Penance

(a) The *remote* matter of Penance is sins committed after Baptism. Mortal sins not yet explicitly confessed and sacramentally forgiven are *necessary* matter. Venial sins, and also mortal sins already explicitly confessed and sacramentally forgiven, are *free* but *sufficient* matter. The *proximate* matter of this sacrament, according to the more common theological view, consists of the three acts of the penitent—confession, contrition and satisfaction.

(b) Christ implicitly commanded the confession of sin as an essential part of Penance when He empowered the apostles and their successors both to forgive and to retain sins. For in order to know whether he should forgive or retain the penitent's sins the priest must know them. Moreover, confession has always been regarded in the Church as a divinely imposed obligation. The penitent is bound to confess all mortal sins which have not yet been explicitly confessed and sacramentally forgiven. Both the number and the specific nature of these sins must be told. Venial sins need not be confessed. In certain extraordinary circumstances it suffices for the sacrament of Penance that the penitent confess in general that he has sinned, without any further details. In such a case he is obliged to confess explicitly the mortal sins thus implicitly confessed when he next receives the sacrament normally.

The deliberate concealment of a mortal sin renders Penance invalid and fruitless, and this is a grave sin of sacrilege. Before confessing, a person must examine his conscience carefully. Confession, instead of being a repulsive burden, is a source of strength and consolation.

(c) Contrition is an act of sorrow for sin, based on a supernatural motive, and including the purpose of not sinning mortally in future. A sinner must have contrition for his sins in order to obtain their forgiveness from God. When motivated by love for God, contrition is called *perfect,* and procures the pardon of sins before the reception of Penance. Contrition based on any other supernatural motive is called *imperfect,* and suffices for the worthy reception of Penance, even though it is based only on the fear of God's punishments. Contrition must extend to all mortal sins. For the reception of Penance it must be *externally* manifested.

(d) A satisfaction, or penance, is imposed on the penitent by the priest chiefly to obtain the remission of his temporal punishment. The penitent is obliged to perform this satisfactory work, for it is an *integral* part of the sacrament.

(e) The form of Penance is the words pronounced vocally by the priest while the penitent is present: "I absolve thee from thy sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The Minister and the Recipient of Penance

(a) Only a bishop or a priest, acting as God's representative, can forgive sins in the sacrament of Penance. Besides the power of Holy Orders, the minister requires *jurisdiction* over the penitent, since the administration of this sacrament is a judicial process. Sometimes certain grave sins are reserved to higher ecclesiastical authorities.

(b) Any one who has sinned after Baptism can be the recipient of Penance. One who has sinned *mortally* must confess within a year or when in danger of death. One who has only venial sins, or mortal sins already explicitly confessed and sacramentally forgiven, is not obliged to receive Penance by divine law or by the *general* law of the Church. However, by *special* ecclesiastical law certain persons—for example, religious—are obliged to receive this sacrament frequently.

Conclusion

The best way to show our gratitude to God for the sacrament of Penance is to receive it frequently and fervently. Two extremes must be avoided—scrupulosity and carelessness. When we receive this sacrament we should picture Christ saying to us: "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

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BY REV. FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

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Introduction

THE Son of God came down to earth from heaven and took unto Himself a human nature to bring happiness to mankind. The happiness that He primarily sought to procure for His fellow-men was the everlasting bliss of His heavenly kingdom. He merited this for us by the sufferings and labors of His earthly life, and especially by His agonizing death on the cross. He also wished to provide us with the means of attaining to a measure of happiness even on earth, and of finding comfort and encouragement amid the trials and the temptations that are the earthly portion of every human being. "Come unto Me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (*Matthew,* XI, 28), He said to those that were weary of the battle of life. That consoling invitation was addressed, not merely to those who heard His voice nineteen centuries ago, but also to the men and women of future generations until the end of time.

Accordingly, for every contingency of human life, for every crisis in which man's natural powers need to be sustained and strengthened, some form of supernatural help is available in the Church established by Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church. The chief means given by Our Saviour to His Church to strengthen and console us in our pilgrimage from the cradle to the grave are the seven signs and instruments of divine grace known as the sacraments. A study of the sacraments will show that they are perfectly adapted to provide

a remedy for our principal spiritual needs and to aid us in the performance of the particular duties of our state of life. Baptism takes away the stain of original sin, and Penance remits sins committed after Baptism. Confirmation gives us strength against the enemies of our salvation, and the Holy Eucharist helps us to make progress in the virtues, especially in the most excellent of the virtues, love of God. Matrimony gives married couples the graces they need to be faithful to the obligations of the marital state, and Holy Orders provides the priest with the supernatural guidance and strength which he requires in the arduous labors and duties of his sacred calling.

If there is any time when a human being needs encouragement and consolation it is at the hour of death. When a person's body is weakened by disease and his soul is terrified at the anticipation of the judgment he is soon to undergo before the throne of the Almighty, he looks for some spiritual remedy to enable him to endure his pain and anguish patiently and bravely. Has Jesus Christ provided for the needs of that dread hour? In view of His mercy and loving solicitude for mankind, it would seem strange if He had not instituted some means of alleviating the sufferings of the dying. According to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, Our Lord has established for this purpose a special sacrament, the sacrament of Extreme Unction. Through the anointing of his body with blessed oil and the prayer of the priest the dying Christian is strengthened and consoled and prepared for entrance into eternal life.

EXTREME UNCTION

BY REVEREND FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

THE EXISTENCE OF EXTREME UNCTION

Extreme Unction in the Bible

The Apostle St. James the Less in his Epistle—called the "Catholic Epistle" because it was addressed, not to the Christians of a particular locality but to the entire body of the faithful—delivers this admonition: "Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him" (*James,* V, 14-15).

A careful examination of this text will show that the rite which the Apostle prescribes for those who are seriously sick has all the essentials of a sacrament. A sacrament is defined as a sacred rite which is a sign of grace and at the same time produces grace, and has been instituted by Christ. The ceremony described by St. James is undoubtedly a sacred rite, and not a mere bodily remedy for the sick; for the Apostle knew that the anointing with oil is not a cure for every disease. Moreover, the use of prayer, one of the essential elements of this rite, as well as its power to forgive sins, plainly indicate that it is intended as a spiritual remedy—that it is a sacred sign of supernatural grace.

Furthermore, this rite is described by the Apostle as producing grace; for the phrases "prayer shall save the sick man"

and "the Lord shall raise him up" refer primarily to the restitution of health of soul rather than of body, as we learn by comparing these phrases with other passages of Holy Writ where the same verbs are used.* All possibility of doubt regarding the efficacy of this rite to produce grace is eliminated by the phrase "if he be in sins they shall be forgiven him" for the forgiveness of sins is accomplished only by the infusion of divine grace into the soul.

Hence, the anointing of the sick of which St. James speaks is a true Christian sacrament. The text does not indeed explicitly state that Our Lord instituted this rite; but it implies this by prescribing that the anointing be done "in the name of the Lord"—for "the Lord" throughout the New Testament means the God-Man, Jesus Christ. In scriptural language, to act "in the name of Christ" means to do something at His command and by His authority (Cf. *Acts,* III 6-VIII 16). Furthermore, from other sources—especially from the constant tradition of the Church—we know that Our Saviour reserved to Himself the power to institute all the rites capable of conferring grace by their inherent efficacy, or *sacraments* as we call them. And so, St. James was not describing a ceremony of his own invention, but was promulgating a sacred sign and cause of grace instituted by Christ Himself.

When precisely Our Lord established the sacrament of Extreme Unction is not evident from the New Testament. A few theologians have suggested that the anointing of the sick with oil performed by the Apostles when Christ sent them out for a brief mission in the course of His own public ministry (*Mark,* VI, 13) was the sacrament of Extreme Unction. But this view is improbable, for the apostles were not yet priests, and those to whom they administered this anointing were probably not yet baptized—and by the ordinary law of Christ this sacrament can be conferred only by a priest, and received only by a baptized person. Theologians nowadays commonly hold, therefore, that the anointing given

* For example, *James* II, 14; V, 20—*Romans* XIII, 11.

by the apostles on that occasion only prefigured our sacrament, and was intended principally to restore bodily health (*Luke,* IX, 6); and that Our Saviour actually instituted Extreme Unction during the forty days He spent on earth after His resurrection, when He frequently appeared to the Apostles and spoke to them "of the kingdom of God" (*Acts,* I, 3).

Extreme Unction in the Church

Catholics regard the traditions and practices of the Church as very important factors in establishing the truth and the meaning of the doctrines of faith. According to Catholic belief, not all the doctrines of Christian revelation are contained in the Bible; some were communicated to the Church by Christ and by His Apostles only in the form of oral tradition. Furthermore, doctrines that are contained in the Bible somewhat obscurely and indefinitely are best explained by the beliefs and religious customs of the Church through the centuries, for the Catholic Church is the divinely authorized interpreter of the Christian revelation.

Through writings that date from the earliest centuries we know that the Church always recognized Extreme Unction as a sacrament. It is true, the term *sacrament* was not applied to this rite in primitive Christian times, for this term was not used in its present meaning until the twelfth century. But the early writers unhesitatingly proposed the ceremony of anointing the sick as a rite established by Christ to give grace—which is a sacrament. Among other early writers who testify to the use and to the sacramental nature of this rite can be mentioned Origen in the third century, St. John Chrysostom in the fourth century, Pope St. Innocent I in the fifth century, and St. Caesarius of Arles in the sixth century. Especially, we have the collection of liturgical prayers ascribed to Serapion, who was a bishop in northern Africa about the year 350, one of which was used in blessing the oil for anointing the sick (Kern, *De Extrema Unctione,* pp. 6-59).

In the course of time a variety of terms has been used to designate this sacrament—for example, "Anointing of the Sick," "Anointing with Holy Oil," "Chrism." The name "Extreme (last) Unction" has been commonly used in the Latin Church since the twelfth century. The fitness of this title is evident—first, because this sacrament is intended for the last hours of life. Secondly, because it is the last of the several anointings the Christian receives in the course of his lifetime, other anointings having been given him in Baptism, Confirmation and, if he is a priest, in Holy Orders.

The founders of the Protestant sects in the sixteenth century rejected the sacrament of Extreme Unction. In general the Protestants of the present day take the same attitude and provide no special sacramental rite for their dying members. Yet, a proof that the human heart naturally yearns for some such spiritual alleviation in the hour of death is the fact that in recent years some Episcopalian clergymen have begun to recognize this sacrament again, and perform a ceremony similar to the Catholic rite of Extreme Unction over the dying.

It is also important to note that those Eastern Christians who have long been separated from the Catholic Church—for example, the Greek Orthodox Church which renounced its allegiance to the Pope in the ninth century, and the Nestorian and Coptic Churches which severed themselves from Catholic unity about the fifth century—recognize Extreme Unction as a sacrament, instituted by Jesus Christ. Now, since these Oriental Christians are very hostile to the Catholic Church and would not accept any ceremony originating in that Church, their acknowledgment of Extreme Unction as a sacrament proves that when they ceased to be Catholics they took this ceremony with them, not as a rite instituted by the Catholic Church, but as one of the sacraments established by Jesus Christ.

Of course, the Oriental Uniate churches have the sacrament of Extreme Unction, for their members are Catholics in

the fullest sense, and they differ from the Latin Church only in the manner of their ceremonies and in certain matters of ecclesiastical legislation. Among Greek Christians, both Orthodox and Uniate, this sacrament is usually called *Euchelaion,* which means "Prayer-anointing."

THE ELEMENTS OF EXTREME UNCTION

Catholic theologians distinguish in each of the seven sacraments two essential parts, known respectively as the *matter* and the *form.* The matter is the indeterminate element, and in general is made up of material things or human actions. The form is the element that determines the precise purpose of the rite, and consists of words spoken by the person administering the sacrament. The former is again distinguished into remote and proximate matter. The remote matter is a material thing existing before the conferring of the sacrament; the proximate matter is the medium—usually a human action—by which the remote matter is applied to the person receiving the sacrament. For example, in Baptism the remote matter is the water; the proximate matter is the action by which the water is applied (either immersion or pouring or sprinkling); the form is the words: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

Now, let us consider these three elements as they are found in the sacrament of Extreme Unction.

The Remote Matter

The remote matter of Extreme Unction is olive oil which has been specially blessed for this sacrament. St. James in his Epistle prescribes that the priests anoint the sick man with *oil;* and though he does not explicitly say that it must be *olive oil,* yet this is certainly implied in the text, because in ancient literature the word "oil" without further specification means oil from the olive. Moreover, the Church has

always considered olive oil alone as the essential remote matter of this sacrament. The theologians and spiritual writers point out the suitability of this substance for the anointing of the sick; for olive oil has a soothing effect on the tired muscles of the body, and accordingly has been most appropriately chosen as the instrument of God's power to confer supernatural alleviation on the weary soul drawing near the end of life's journey.

Before being used for the administration of Extreme Unction the olive oil must be blessed. If unblessed oil were used, the sacrament would be null and void. In the Latin rite, this blessing is performed by a bishop. Ordinarily this ceremony takes place during the Mass celebrated by the bishop in his cathedral on Holy Thursday. Since it is a strict law of the Church that any holy oil used in the administration of the sacraments shall have been blessed on the Holy Thursday immediately preceding, the oil is distributed to the priests throughout each diocese as soon as possible after the ceremony of Holy Thursday. However, oil blessed on a previous occasion can always be used as *valid* matter of the sacrament. In case of necessity, when recently blessed oil is not available, a priest may lawfully use the oil from a previous blessing.

At the same ceremony of Holy Thursday two other kinds of holy oil are blessed—chrism and the oil of catechumens. These are used for various sacred rites—for example, chrism is employed for the sacrament of Confirmation, and the oil of catechumens is used to anoint the recipient of Baptism before the pouring of the water. If a priest had no oil of the sick but had one of these other species of blessed oil, he could make use of this latter to anoint a person in danger of death, in the hope that it may be valid matter of Extreme Unction. However, if the oil of the sick should later be procured, the ceremony would be repeated conditionally, since the validity of the first anointing is doubtful.

In the Oriental Churches—for example, the Greek, the

Syrian, the Armenian—both those that acknowledge the primacy of the Pope and those that are separated from the Catholic Church, priests as well as bishops can bless the oil of the sick. This custom has been in vogue in the East for many centuries, and is permitted by the Pope. However, as far as historical evidence touching on this point is available, no priest of the Latin rite was ever empowered to give this blessing (Kilker, *Extreme Unction,* pp. 301-302).

In some Oriental rites a little water is added to the oil of the sick as a symbol of Baptism, or a little wine to commemorate the oil and wine which the good Samaritan poured into the wounds of the stricken traveler (*Luke,* X, 34). Sometimes even a little dust from the tomb of a saint is added. But in all these cases the amount of the extraneous matter is very small, so that the matter of the sacrament remains substantially olive oil.

The Proximate Matter

The proximate matter of Extreme Unction, or the medium by which the remote matter is applied, is the anointing of the body of the sick person. This is in accordance with the words of St. James, who commands that the priests shall pray over the sick man "anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (*James,* V, 14). However, this scriptural text does not specify the number of anointings required, or the parts of the body to be anointed. There has been a wide diversity of practice in these respects down through the centuries. Thus, the Gregorian Sacramentary, which was compiled in the eighth century, orders the priest to anoint the sick person "on the neck and throat and between the shoulders, and on the breast or in the place of pain." In some parts of Spain in the early middle ages only one anointing was given, on the head. In other regions of the Catholic world as many as twelve or fourteen anointings were performed in the administration of Extreme Unction. (Kilker,

Extreme Unction, p. 65 seq.—Kern, *De Extrema Unctione,* p. 136 seq.). Even today, there are different customs relative to this matter among the Oriental Christians, some giving four, others seven anointings (Kern, id., p. 134).

Evidently, Our Lord did not determine the number of anointings required for this sacrament, but left this matter to the discretion of the ecclesiastical authorities. Hence, in the early centuries in different parts of the Church there was a great variety of customs in the manner of anointing. Today there is uniformity throughout the entire Latin Church. The ritual books prescribe that under ordinary circumstances six anointings shall be given—on the eyes, the ears, the nose, the mouth, the hands and the feet. The first five correspond to the five senses through which the soul receives all its impressions from without—and which, accordingly, are the gate-ways of sin. The anointing of the feet can be omitted for any reasonable cause.

However, in case of necessity—especially, if the sick person seems to be on the very verge of death—the Church allows a priest to administer the sacrament of Extreme Unction with only one anointing. This can be conferred on any sense—and hence, on any part of the body, since the sense of touch extends over the entire body. However, it is preferably given on the forehead, because in the head are centered all the senses. When the priest has conferred the sacrament in this manner, he afterwards supplies the omitted anointings—that is, of the eyes, ears, etc.—if circumstances permit. For, although the sacrament has been *essentially* given, these unctions pertain to its *integrity,* and probably give additional graces.

Even a person who has never had the use of one or other of the senses—for example, a man who has been blind from birth—receives the anointing on the organs of that sense, for he might have sinned by a desire for an evil use of that sense. If one of the members of the body which should be anointed has been amputated—a hand or a foot, for example—the part

of the body nearest to the missing member receives the anointing with the usual formula.

Each anointing is made in the form of a cross, the sacred sign that is employed so frequently in the ceremonies of the Catholic Church. In anointing the eyes, the ears, the hands and the feet, the priest makes a cross with the blessed oil on each of the two members. Only one cross is made on the mouth, with the lips closed. The priest is at liberty to make only one sign of the cross on the bridge of the nose, or to make two crosses, one on each nostril (Kilker, *Extreme Unction,* p. 367). The hands are anointed on the palms, the feet either on the instep or on the sole. However, priests are anointed on the back of the hands, since they have had the palms anointed at the time of their ordination.

The priest may use an instrument—for example, a brush or a stick with cotton wrapped around the end—for the conferring of the anointings in case of great necessity. Such a case would occur if there was grave danger of contagion from a dangerous disease, or if the person were in an inaccessible place and could be reached only in this manner (Kilker, p. 404).

The Form

Just as there have been many different methods of anointing in the course of the centuries, so there have been many different formulas of prayer constituting the form of Extreme Unction. But they all have this element in common—they contain a petition to the Almighty to bestow help on the sick person. Accordingly, we can reasonably infer that Our Saviour stipulated nothing more than this as the essential element of the form of this sacrament, and left it to the Church to decide how the prayer should be expressed.

In the administration of Extreme Unction according to the rite of the Latin Church at the present time, the priest first gives a crucifix to the sick person to kiss, and sprinkles him and the room with holy water. Then he recites two

prayers, asking that Our Divine Lord may be present and bless the home, and that the Eternal Father may send His angel to protect all dwelling therein. The *Confiteor* ("I confess to Almighty God," etc.) is then recited, followed by the two brief invocations of the priest, petitioning God's pardon and mercy for the sick man or woman. After this the priest delivers an impressive exorcism against the powers of darkness who may be molesting the dying Christian.

However, these prayers do not pertain to the essential nature of the sacrament, and when time presses they may be shortened or omitted. The form proper of Extreme Unction is recited only while the priest is actually conferring the anointings. It consists of this prayer, while he is anointing the eyes: "Through this holy anointing and through His most compassionate mercy may the Lord pardon thee whatsoever failings thou hast committed by sight. Amen." The same form is repeated at each of the other five anointings, except that instead of "by sight" are said respectively "by hearing," "by smell," "by taste and speech," "by touch" and "by walking."

After finishing the anointing, the priest recites three more prayers, beseeching God to bestow health of soul and of body on the sick person. However, like those that preceded the anointing, these prayers are not a part of the essential sacramental form.

When Extreme Unction is given with only one anointing, in the extraordinary circumstances spoken of above (p. 11), the form consists merely of the words: "Through this holy anointing may the Lord pardon thee whatsoever failings thou hast committed. Amen."

THE EFFECTS OF EXTREME UNCTION

Each of the sacraments, being a manifestation of the love and of the power of Jesus Christ, produces in the soul of one who receives it worthily many wondrous effects, of which we

can have only a very inadequate appreciaton in the present life. However, guided by the Catholic Church, the authoritative and divinely protected interpreter of Sacred Scripture and Tradition, we can come to some understanding of the way in which the sacraments operate and of the supernatural benefits they confer. Thus, the Catholic Church teaches that the sacraments bestow grace on the recipients *ex opere operato* —that is, *directly, through a supernatural power given them by God,* and not merely indirectly, or through the good dispositions they inspire in those that receive them. At the same time, the Church teaches that in the case of a person who has reached the use of reason the measure of grace produced by a sacrament is in proportion to his dispositions at the time of the reception. These dispositions do not indeed make the sacrament more effective but they make the person more receptive.

Each sacrament is intended to confer two kinds of grace—*sanctifying* and *sacramental.* Sanctifying grace is a supernatural quality that makes the soul in which it resides pleasing to the Almighty and in some sense a partaker of His divine nature, and gives it a claim to eternal happiness. When sanctifying grace is given to one in mortal sin, it cleanses his soul from this sin and is called *first* grace; when given to one already in the state of grace it makes him more pleasing to God and enriches him with a claim to greater happiness in heaven, and is called *second* grace. Baptism and Penance are intended primarily to give first grace, and are known as *sacraments of the dead* because they are principally directed toward conferring supernatural life on those dead in sin. The other five sacraments are intended primarily to give second grace, and are named *sacraments of the living* because they are destined principally to give a fuller measure of the supernatural life to those already possessing the life of grace.

Besides sanctifying grace each sacrament gives sacramental grace. The sacramental grace given by each sacrament is a special divine gift, proper to the particular sacrament, and

bringing with it a right to those actual graces that are necessary for the attainment of the purpose of the sacrament. Thus, the sacramental grace of Baptism has annexed to it a title to the actual graces required by the recipient that he may live as a true follower of Jesus Christ. The sacramental grace of Matrimony gives the married couple a claim to the actual graces necessary for the proper fulfilment of the duties of the married state. Even purely natural favors, if they are conducive to a person's spiritual benefit, are sometimes granted by virtue of the sacramental grace of a sacrament worthily received.

With these general principles before our eyes, let us consider the effects of the sacrament of Extreme Unction.

Sanctifying Grace

Extreme Unction was instituted by Jesus Christ primarily to give second grace—that is, He intended it principally to increase sanctifying grace in souls already endowed with this divine quality. Hence, Extreme Unction is one of the sacraments of the living, intended for the greater purification of the soul which has been justified by the sacrament of Penance.This has ever been the belief of the Catholic Church. We find this point emphasized in the early Church in the order in which the sacraments were conferred on a dying person, and which differed somewhat from that observed at the present day. Nowadays, the order is—Penance, Holy Eucharist, Extreme Unction; but in the early centuries it was—Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Eucharist. Thus the Catholics of those centuries emphasized the power of Extreme Unction to remove the remains of sin—that is, to increase the purity and sanctity of the soul which had just received the life of grace through the sacrament of Penance.

Therefore, one who is about to receive Extreme Unction and is conscious of the presence of mortal sin in his soul, is first obliged to regain the state of sanctifying grace. Other-

wise, he will derive no grace from this sacrament, and will be guilty of a mortal sin of sacrilege. Strictly speaking, such a person could prepare himself sufficiently for the reception of Extreme Unction by making an act of perfect contrition, with the intention of confessing his sins subsequently. However, ordinarily he would be obliged to receive the sacrament of Penance before being anointed, and this for two reasons—first, because usually the Holy Eucharist is given on the same occasion as Extreme Unction, and there is a strict law commanding one who has sinned mortally since his last confession to confess again before receiving Holy Communion. Secondly, there is a divine law prescribing that before death a person must confess all his mortal sins that have not as yet been explicitly confessed and forgiven in the sacrament of Penance. Usually when a person is sick enough to receive Extreme Unction, the danger of death imposes on him the duty of fulfilling this law at once.

The degree of sanctifying grace conferred by Extreme Unction is proportionate to the fervor of the dispositions with which a person receives this sacrament. The practical conclusion from this principle is, that when one is in danger of death, even though the danger is not immediate, the priest should be summoned to anoint the sick person while he is still in full possession of his senses, so that he may thus be able to prepare himself worthily for the reception of this important sacrament.

Although destined primarily to give an increase of sanctifying grace to those already in the friendship of God, Extreme Unction can at times remit mortal sins and restore the life of grace to the sinner. This is deduced from the words of St. James: "If he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him" (*James,* V, 15). Catholic theologians teach that two conditions are necessary in order that one in mortal sin may regain the state of grace through Extreme Unction. The first is, that he be unconscious of his unworthiness. This condition may be realized in various ways—for example, he may think

he has made a good confession, but in reality there was some flaw which prevented him from receiving the pardon of his sins in the sacred tribunal. However, the usual case in which this first condition is present is when a person is actually deprived of the use of his reason, either permanently or temporarily. The second condition is that he have sorrow for his mortal sins because of some supernatural motive—even though it is the most imperfect motive, fear of hell. Whenever these two conditions are present in a sinner who is seriously ill, the sacrament of Extreme Unction will immediately cleanse his soul of sin and restore him to the state of grace.

The most practical application of this doctrine is had in the case of a Catholic who has been stricken unconscious by sickness or an accident. If before losing the use of his faculties he realized for a fleeting moment that he was in mortal sin, and made a brief act of repentance based on the dread of God's punishment that was due to him, the sacrament of Extreme Unction conferred on him while he is unconscious will at once restore him to the state of sanctifying grace. If he dies without regaining consciousness, his soul will be saved. Of course, if he comes to the use of his senses again, he is still bound to confess his mortal sins.

It is important to note that the mere intention of having contrition is not sufficient to procure the state of grace, even with the sacrament of Extreme Unction. Sometimes a Catholic who is leading a sinful life is heard to say: "When I am going to die, I'll repent and receive the sacraments"—and he may be really sincere in this resolution. But if he becomes unconscious with this attitude toward his sins, neither Extreme Unction nor any other sacrament will remit his transgressions. God demands contrition really present in the heart, not the mere purpose of having contrition at some future time.

Sacramental Grace

The special sacramental grace of Extreme Unction confers on the recipient a claim to many particular supernatural aids. St. James tells of three effects of this sacrament—the sick man shall be saved, raised up, and freed from sin (*James,* V, 15). In explaining this text, the Council of Trent ascribes to this sacrament the power to remit sin (if there be any on the person's soul) and the remains of sin, to comfort and to strengthen the soul, to stir up great confidence in the divine mercy by which the sick person is enabled to bear his sufferings more readily and more easily to overcome temptation, and finally sometimes to give health of body when it is expedient for the health of the soul (Denzinger, *Enchiridion,* n. 909).

However, theologians strive to find some *general* purpose of this sacrament to which all these particular effects are directed. A most consoling view, and one which is quite probable, has won the approval of many good theologians in recent years. According to this opinion the chief object of Extreme Unction is to restore the soul to perfect spiritual health and thus to prepare it for immediate entrance into heaven. To the attainment of this object the sacrament bestows whatever supernatural helps the individual may need—encouragement, strength, consolation, the forgiveness of venial sins (and sometimes even the remission of mortal sins, as we saw above (p. 16), the removal of the remains of sin—such as inordinate affection for earthly things, weakness of the will—and the remission of all the temporal punishment due to sins previously forgiven.

It might be urged against this view that if it were true, no one who has received Extreme Unction would have to go to Purgatory, yet the Church bids us pray for the faithful who have departed this life even after receiving this sacrament. Our answer to this objection is, that we can never be sure that any particular individual when receiving Extreme Unction had all the dispositions necessary for the com-

plete attainment of its general purpose. Perhaps he did not have sincere contrition for certain venial sins. Even the slightest venial sin remains unforgiven, and the temporal punishment due to it remains unpardoned until the person who has committed it is repentant. Perhaps too, a degree of fervor somewhat above the ordinary is demanded by God of the dying Christian before He will forgive the entire debt of temporal punishment. Evidently, therefore, we can never have absolute certainty that any individual in particular fulfilled all these requirements and so, we continue to pray for our dear departed even though they received Extreme Unction before their entrance into eternity.

On the other hand, those who accept this consoling view as to the chief purpose of Extreme Unction contend that our Lord would not demand for the full efficacy of this sacrament such perfect dispositions as would be found only in great saints. "Such a manner of acting," says Father Kern, S.J. (*De Extrema Unctione,* p. 190), "would be unsuited to the gentle Heart of our loving Lord."

Of the various *particular* effects conferred by this sacrament in disposing the soul for its journey to eternity, the first and principal grace would seem to be spiritual strength and encouragement. This is the source of the remarkable spirit of peace and cheerfulness that is so frequently noticed and admired by non-Catholic doctors and nurses in dying Catholics after they have been anointed. However, it is to be noted, that this supernatural strength is intended specifically to offset the debility of soul which naturally flows from grave *bodily* infirmity. Hence, as we shall see later, the mere danger of death as such is not an adequate reason for the reception of Extreme Unction, but it is necessary that one be in danger of death because of some affliction of *body* which is *actually* present.

Restoration of Bodily Health

An effect that is sometimes produced by the special sacramental grace of Extreme Unction is the restoration of the sick person to health of body. This has been the constant belief of the Catholic Church, as is evident from the liturgical prayers recited in connection with this sacrament and from the writings of the early Fathers. Thus, in the prayer for the blessing of the oil of the sick employed by the African Bishop Serapion in the fourth century there is a petition that the oil may procure for the recipients "health and integrity of soul and of body and of spirit." Caesarius of Arles, who lived in the sixth century, wrote that by the anointing a sick person merits "health of body and the remission of sins" (*Homily* XIII). The Church has authoritatively sanctioned this doctrine, by teaching in both the Council of Florence and the Council of Trent that this sacrament sometimes confers health of body—with the qualifying clause "when it is expedient to the health of the soul" (Denzinger, *Enchiridion,* nn. 700, 909). Evidently therefore, the words of St. James, "The prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up" are to be understood of a restoration of bodily as well as of spiritual forces.

However, for the proper understanding of the Catholic teaching on this matter, two important points must be emphasized. First, health of body is given by this sacrament only in as far as it is conducive to the *spiritual* welfare of the patient. All the gifts of God are intended primarily for the benefit of our souls; and this is particularly true of the effects produced by the sacraments which are first and foremost instruments of spiritual good.

Secondly, the manner in which health of body results from Extreme Unction is not miraculous, but is a consequence of the intimate union between soul and body. It is a well known physiological fact that when a person's mind is tranquil and happy, there is a favorable reaction in his body. In

fact, it sometimes happens that physical ailments are completely cured when the sick person is inspired with hope and courage. Now, the health of body which at times is one of the effects of Extreme Unction is produced in this manner—that is, as a result of the supernatural comfort and strength infused into the soul. And so, health of body as an effect of Extreme Unction is directly natural, and indirectly supernatural. Of course, God can—and doubtless sometimes does—miraculously cure a sick person on the occasion of his being anointed. But all that we have the right to expect as the normal effect of this sacrament in the body is the benefit that accrues from the restoration of the soul to a state of spiritual health.

Because of the possibility of a restoration of physical health by Extreme Unction, this sacrament should be conferred as soon as a sick person is in danger of death. If its administration is deferred until a person is about to breathe his last, the sacrament is no longer capable of benefiting his bodily condition according to its normal mode of operation.

THE MINISTER AND THE RECIPIENT OF EXTREME UNCTION

The Minister

The Catholic Church teaches that only a priest can administer the sacrament of Extreme Unction. The text of the Epistle of St. James, from which we have so frequently quoted, furnishes an argument for this doctrine—"Let him bring in the priests of the Church" (*James,* V, 14). Some non-Catholics have asserted that the Apostle was here referring to the elderly laymen of the Christian community. Their principal argument is that the Greek word *presbyter,* which is used in the original text of the Epistle and is translated as *priest* in our English version, really means *an old man.* But this contention is opposed to sound scholarship. For, in the

first place, the Greek word in question, although in classical literature it did signify *an old man* was employed frequently by the writers of the New Testament to designate a duly ordained minister of Christ's Church—that is, a bishop or a priest.* Secondly, in this particular text all ambiguity is taken away by the words which St. James adds—"priests *of the Church*"—clearly indicating that he is referring only to those men who have been solemnly consecrated to the sacred ministry by the indelible character of Christ's priesthood through Holy Orders.

The practice of the Church can be taken as an additional argument, for it has been acknowledged from the earliest centuries of the Christian era that the power to confer Extreme Unction is possessed only by priests and bishops.

Any priest or bishop can administer this sacrament *validly;* but according to ecclesiastical legislation the right to give Extreme Unction *lawfully* belongs ordinarily to the pastor of the parish in which the sick person is actually present. In case of necessity, when the pastor or one of his assistant priests cannot be had, any other priest may anoint the dying man or woman, with the reasonably presumed permission of the pastor or of the bishop (Canon 938).

Among the Christians of the Oriental rites, both Catholic and non-Catholic, it is customary to have Extreme Unction administered, when possible, by several priests—at least three, and sometimes as many as seven. The Oriental Christians regard this method as more in conformity with the injunction of St. James, to bring in the *priests* of the Church. Indeed, this same method was in vogue in the Latin Church during the early centuries. St. Thomas Aquinas, the outstanding theologian of the Catholic Church, speaks approvingly of the custom of having several priests anoint a sick person. (*Contra Gentiles,* IV, 73). However, nowadays throughout the entire Western Church—that is, wherever the Latin rite is used—one priest alone administers this sacrament.

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* For example, in *Acts,* XX, 17, 28—I *Timothy,* V, 17—*Titus,* I, 5.

A priest, even if he is at the point of death and no other priest is present, cannot anoint himself. A decision to this effect was issued by the Congregation of the Propaganda in 1844; and is entirely in accord with the constant tradition of the Church (Kern, *De Extrema Unctione,* p. 247). In this we see an application of the general plan of Divine Providence which decrees that all human beings must depend in some degree on others, in both their spiritual and their material needs.

The Recipient

That a person may receive the sacrament of Extreme Unction validly, the following conditions must be fulfilled:

(1) He must have been baptized. For, it is a divine law that no one can receive validly any other sacrament until the indelible character of Baptism has been impressed on his soul.

(2) He must have come to the use of reason. Therefore, a child who has not yet come to the perception of right and wrong—which usually is attained at about the seventh year—or a person who has been an imbecile all his life cannot be anointed. This condition is implied by St. James when he says that the sick person himself is to summon the priests—something which only one who has attained to the use of reason could do. Moreover, it has always been the custom of the Church to refuse Extreme Unction to young children. Indeed, during the middle ages and even as late as the sixteenth century, in some parts of Europe this sacrament was not given to anyone under the age of fourteen years (Kilker, *Extreme Unction,* p. 141). However, nowadays the law of the Church prescribes that even one who has only probably reached the use of reason shall be anointed conditionally (Canon 941).

The reason for this requisite is that one who has not attained to the use of reason is incapable of the benefit which, as we said above (p. 19), is probably the principal particular

effect of Extreme Unction—spiritual strength and encouragement. Besides one who has never had the use of reason has never committed an actual sin, and hence does not stand in any need of the cleansing effects of this sacrament. However, if a person once had the use of reason and subsequently lost it, he can be anointed when in danger of death, for he may be able to profit by some of the effects of Extreme Unction, especially the remission of sin and of its remains.

(3) The recipient must be in danger of death from some bodily infirmity actually present, either because of a grave illness or because of a serious injury. This condition, like the previous one, is implied in the prescription of St. James, that the sick man shall summon the priests to his home—and therefore the presumption is that the sickness is of a serious nature, rendering him incapable of leaving the house. We have also the constant doctrine of the Church that this sacrament is intended only for those who are so gravely ill that they are in danger of death. However, the mere fact that one is in danger of death does not necessarily enable him to receive Extreme Unction. Thus, a soldier going into battle or a criminal about to be executed could not be anointed. The reason is that this sacrament is specifically intended for the alleviation of those trials and anxieties of spirit which normally flow from bodily infirmity; and one who is in good health, even though he is in danger of death, is not subject to those particular spiritual sufferings. However, when an elderly person is liable to die soon, not because of any specific malady, but because of the weakened condition of his health due to his advanced age, he can and should be anointed.

Since it is probable that the soul may remain in the body for several hours after all signs of life have ceased—especially in the case of sudden death—a priest may anoint a person who has been suddenly stricken, even though he has been apparently dead for three or four hours.

(4) To receive Extreme Unction validly a person must have the intention of receiving this sacrament; for Our Lord has

made it a general law that those who have reached the use of reason cannot validly partake of the sacraments unless they wish to do so by their own deliberate choice. However, Extreme Unction demands on the part of the recipient only a *general* and *habitual* intention. Thus, a Catholic may never have made an explicit intention of receiving this sacrament, yet if he is suddenly stricken unconscious and is in danger of death, he can be validly anointed. For, in his general and habitual purpose of living and dying as a Catholic is sufficiently contained the wish to receive Extreme Unction when this sacrament is needed.

Extreme Unction can be received only once in the same sickness. However, if the sick person shows some improvement for a time, and then again becomes dangerously ill, the sacrament may be repeated. Of course, a person who has entirely recovered from one sickness during which he was anointed, and later contracts another infirmity should certainly be anointed again, for the special graces given by Extreme Unction are no longer granted after complete recovery from the illness that called for the reception of the sacrament.

As was stated previously (p. 15), one must ordinarily be in the state of grace to receive the supernatural fruits of Extreme Unction; although a person in mortal sin will be pardoned if he is unconscious of his unworthiness and has even the most imperfect form of supernatural contrition for his mortal sins. But what of the sinner who receives Extreme Unction without contrition for his transgressions? If he is aware of what he is doing, he commits the grievous sin of sacrilege; if he is unconscious of his unworthiness—for example, if he is stricken down before he had the chance to make an act of contrition—he is, of course, free from the guilt of formal sin. Yet, in either case, he receives no grace from the sacrament. On the other hand, he cannot be anointed again during the same danger of death, as we just saw. Is he then to be deprived of the precious graces which are con-

ferred by Extreme Unction, and which are so helpful in the final hours of life? No—he simply has to supply the requisite dispositions, and the sacrament will *revive,* as theological language expresses it. If he was conscious of the sacrilege he was committing at the time of the anointing, he must make an act of perfect contrition (with the purpose of confessing his sins) or actually go to confession; and then the effects of Extreme Unction will be given him. If however he was unconscious of his unworthiness when he was anointed, and he has committed no mortal sin subsequently, he simply has to make an act of imperfect contrition (attrition, as it is called), with the purpose of going to confession, and at once he will regain the state of grace, and will receive the special benefits of Extreme Unction.

It is a disputed question among theologians whether or not a dying Catholic is strictly obliged to receive Extreme Unction under penalty of mortal sin. At any rate, it can safely be asserted that it is the height of folly for a member of the Catholic Church to refuse to avail himself of the priceless benefits of this sacrament at the hour of death. The relatives of a person afflicted with a grave sickness who defer calling the priest to give the last sacraments because they do not wish to frighten the dying man or woman are guilty of most uncharitable and most un-Christian conduct.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE LAST RITES

We can aptly conclude this pamphlet by giving some practical hints on what should be known and done by Catholics when a member of the family or some one in their care becomes seriously ill.

First, the case should be reported to the pastor of the parish in which the sick person is at present, or to one of the assistant priests. Even though the person resides in another parish, the right to administer Extreme Unction belongs to the pastor of the place in which he is actually lying sick. If

he is in a hospital or other institution having a resident chaplain, this latter should be called. Only when one of these duly authorized priests cannot be had and the sick person is in immediate need of spiritual ministration should another priest be summoned. It is to be noted however, that a person in danger of death can go to confession to any priest he chooses; for the Church wishes her members to have the fullest liberty in regard to the sacrament of Penance.

If possible, an adult should go to request the services of the priest, and he should be able to tell the priest how urgent the danger of death is, whether the sick person is conscious, whether he is able to receive Holy Communion, and when he last received the sacraments. If a child is sent, he should be given a note informing the priest of these matters. It is well to state in passing that although the priest should be summoned as soon as possible when there is need of his services, he should not be called at an inopportune time if it is unnecessary. Thus, if a doctor visiting a patient late at night declares that he has consumption, but at the same time states that he will live for several months more, it is sufficient to wait until the next day to inform the priest.

If the priest is called on the telephone, explicit directions should be given as to the street, the number of the house and of the apartment, etc. When the sick-call takes place late at night, a Catholic man should be sent to accompany the priest from the rectory and to return with him afterward. In such circumstances, if possible, an automobile should be procured, especially if the residence of the sick person is very distant from the priest's house.

In the room of the sick person, the following articles should be prepared:

(1) A small table, covered with a white cloth. On the table should be:

(2) A crucifix.

(3) Two wax candles in candlesticks. The candles should have been blessed.

(4) A vessel of holy water, with a sprinkler. A small piece of blessed palm will serve as a sprinkler.

(5) A glass of plain water, with a tablespoon and a clean napkin.

(6) Six small balls of cotton. The priest uses these to wipe the sacred oil from the sick person after each anointing.

(7) A saucer with several small squares of bread. With these the priest wipes the oil from his hands after the anointings.

These articles are not beyond the means of even the poorest, and every Catholic family should have them always on hand.

If the priest is bringing the Blessed Sacrament, a member of the family should meet him at the door, carrying one of the two candles, lighted. In an apartment house, it suffices to meet him in this manner inside the door of the apartment. This person then leads the priest to the room of the sick person, leaves the candle in its candlestick (lighting the other candle at the same time, if this has not already been done), and leaves the room. When the sick person has made his confession, the priest may invite all the members of the family to enter, in which case they kneel in fervent prayer while the remaining rites of the Church are being administered. If the priest recites the Litany of the Dying, they say "Pray for him (her)" and the other appropriate responses. If the priest has the Blessed Sacrament on his person when he is leaving—that is, if he is on his way to another sick-call, or if he found it impossible to give Holy Communion to the sick person—the same marks of reverence should be given as when he entered, as far as the door of the house or of the apartment.

When the actual hour of death arrives, the members of the family should gather around the bedside of the dying person, and recite the Litany of the Dying, and other appropriate prayers, such as the Rosary, and especially short ejaculatory prayers, such as "My Jesus, mercy"—"Jesus, Mary

and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul"—"Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in thee." The dying person should be given the crucifix to kiss, and be urged to say frequently the holy name of Jesus. A blessed candle should be held in his hand, until he has drawn his last breath, as a symbol of the light of Christian faith with which his soul is illumined in its journey from time to eternity.

Conclusion

In the sacrament of Extreme Unction Our Blessed Redeemer has given us a most precious supernatural gift for which we can never sufficiently thank Him. It is a most commendable practice to pray often that we may be privileged to receive this sacrament, and the other consoling rites of the Catholic Church, when our last hour draws near. A beautiful form of prayer for this intention has been given us by Cardinal Newman:

Prayer

"O my Lord and Saviour, support me in my last hour by the strong arms of Thy sacraments, and the fragrance of Thy consolations. Let Thy absolving words be said over me, and the holy oil sign and seal me; and let Thine own body be my food, and Thy blood my sprinkling; and let Thy Mother Mary come to me, and my angel whisper peace to me and Thy glorious saints and my own dear patrons smile on me, that in and through them all I may die as I desire to live, in Thy Church, in Thy faith and in Thy love. amen." (Father Lasance's *My Prayer Book,* p. 615).

STUDY OUTLINE

Introduction

Since our Lord has provided supernatural aids for all the important contingencies of human life, it is reasonable to infer that He has instituted some means of strengthening and consoling the faithful at the hour of death. Such a means, the Catholic Church teaches, is found in the sacrament of Extreme Unction.

The Existence of Extreme Unction

(a) St. James in his Epistle (V, 14-15) describes a ceremony of the anointing of the sick for their spiritual alleviation. Since this ceremony is an outward sign of grace, it is rightly classified among the sacraments, and therefore must have been instituted by Christ. Probably He instituted this sacrament in the period between His resurrection and His ascension.

(b) Early Christian writings prove that the rite of the anointing of the sick has been in use as a sacrament in the Church since the first centuries. Since the twelfth century this ceremony has been designated "Extreme Unction". Most Protestant denominations reject Extreme Unction; but it is accepted and administered as a sacrament by the non-Catholic Eastern churches.

The Elements of Extreme Unction

(a) The *remote matter* of Extreme Unction is blessed olive oil. The blessing is ordinarily conferred by a bishop at the Mass of Holy Thursday, but a priest can also be delegated by the Pope to bless this oil.

(b) The *proximate matter* of this sacrament is the anointing of the body of the sick person. One anointing suffices for *validity;* but the number and the place of the anointings prescribed by the Church has varied considerably in the course of time. In the Latin rite six anointings are ordinarily given. Each anointing is made in the form of a cross. At times an instrument may be used to anoint.

(c) The *form* of Extreme Unction is the prayer for the sick person recited by the priest while anointing. In the Latin rite this prayer is: "Through this holy anointing and through His most compassionate mercy may the Lord pardon thee whatsoever failings thou has committed by sight (hearing, etc.). Amen". The Church has added other prayers and ceremonies to the administration of Extreme Unction.

The Effects of Extreme Unction

(a) Extreme Unction confers sanctifying grace and sacramental grace. It is intended primarily to give an increase of sanctifying grace to those already possessing this divine quality; but in certain circumstances it can restore the state of grace to one in mortal sin. The sacramental grace of Extreme Unction is the spiritual alleviation of the soul weakened by grave bodily infirmity. It is probable that the chief purpose of this sacrament is the restoration of the soul to *perfect* spiritual health so that it is disposed for *immediate* entrance into heaven. In this view Extreme Unction is capable of condoning the entire debt of temporal punishment of those who receive it with the requisite dispositions.

(b) The sacrament of Extreme Unction can restore the sick person to bodily health if this be conducive to his spiritual welfare. However, this effect is produced only *indirectly*—that is, through the alleviation given to the soul. Because of the possibility of this effect, Extreme Unction should be administered as soon as a sick person is in danger of death.

The Minister and the Recipient of Extreme Unction

(a) Only a bishop or a priest can administer Extreme Unction. Any priest can do so *validly,* but by ecclesiastical law the *right* to give this sacrament belongs ordinarily to the pastor of the parish in which the sick person is present. Among the Oriental Christians it is customary for several priests to concur in giving Extreme Unction; but in the Latin rite only one priest administers this sacrament. A priest cannot anoint himself.

(b) To receive Extreme Unction *validly* a person must have been baptized, have come to the use of reason, be in danger of death from some bodily infirmity actually present, and have at least an implicit intention of receiving this sacrament. Extreme Unction cannot be repeated in the same danger of death. To receive this sacrament *fruitfully,* one must ordinarily be in the state of grace. If received unworthily, the sacrament will later revive, provided the proper dispositions are supplied. It is not certain whether or not there is a strict obligation on dying Catholics to receive Extreme Unction.

Preparations for the Last Rites

(a) When a Catholic is seriously ill, the priest should be informed, and explicit information given regarding the condition of the sick person, the address of the house, etc.

(b) The various objects needed for the last rites—such as candles, crucifix, holy water—should be prepared in the sick room.

(c) The priest should be met at the door by a member of the family carrying a lighted candle, and during the administration of the sacred rites the greatest reverence should be observed by all. When the person is dying the members of the family should be assembled in prayer at the bedside.

Conclusion

The sacrament of Extreme Unction is one of Christ's most precious gift to His followers. Catholics should often pray that they may be privileged to receive this sacrament when the hour of their death comes.

CHRIST IS GOD

By Rev. EDWARD LODGE CURRAN, Ph.D.

Christ said the things which only God can say.
Christ did the things which only God can do.
Therefore Christ is God.

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It is on the historical fact of the Resurrection, the climax of all that Christ said and did, that our belief in the divinity of Christ rests solidly and serene. Christ died on a cross because He was man. Christ rose from the dead because He was God as well as man.

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Holy Orders

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C.SS.R., S.T.D.

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BY REV. FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

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Introduction

THE Catholic priest occupies a unique position of prestige and influence. His words carry great weight, even with many who are not of the Catholic faith. He acts with the calm assurance of being an authorized representative of the Most High and unquestionably an air of supernatural power pervades his person and his activities. The enemies of Catholicism attribute this singular dignity of the priest to some ingenious method employed by the Church in training her clergy. Those who are of the household of the faith know that the real reason for the inherent dignity and the compelling authority of the priest is the fact that he has been raised far above the rank and file of ordinary mortals by the sacrament of Holy Orders—a sacrament that has made him a partaker in an eminent degree of the priestly power of Jesus Christ.

It is the purpose of this pamphlet to discuss the more important aspects of Holy Orders—its origin, its various grades, the ceremonies by which it is conferred, its effects, its minister and its recipient.

HOLY ORDERS

BY REVEREND FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

THE ORIGIN OF HOLY ORDERS

The First Priests

The first man to become a priest of the New Law was the God-Man, Jesus Christ. According to St. Paul the priesthood of our Saviour was predicted a thousand years before His birth by the royal prophet, King David, who sang under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost: "Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech" (*Psalms,* CIX, 4; *Hebrews,* V, 6). Our Lord became a priest by the very fact that He was a divine Person possessing a human nature. A priest is essentially one who stands between God and man, bringing God's gifts of grace and mercy to man, and bringing man's gifts of sacrifice and prayer to God. By the Incarnation Christ has taken to Himself a human nature infinitely below the divine nature, yet at the same time immeasurably elevated above every other created nature. Accordingly, from the moment of His earthly conception Christ has stood between God and men as the eternal high Priest of the New Law. On earth He offered to His Father the sacrifice of His own passion and death. In heaven He still continues to intercede for us, that the merits and satisfactions He acquired during His mortal life may be applied to our souls in abundance. Moreover, every supernatural gift bestowed on mankind comes through the human nature of our Lord as the most exalted instrument of the divine power. In view of this constant exercise of His priestly power, we can appreciate the force of St. Paul's assertion

that Christ "hath an everlasting priesthood" (*Hebrews*, VII, 24).

The Son of God wished that other men should share in the dignity and in the powers of His priesthood. During the three years of His mortal life devoted to the public ministry He gathered about Him twelve men—generally called the twelve apostles—and deputed them to teach, to sanctify and to rule men in His name, and thus to bring them to eternal salvation. As the end of His earthly life drew near, Christ endowed the apostles with extraordinary priestly powers to enable them to carry out their mission.

On the night before His death, while at supper with the twelve apostles, Christ changed bread and wine into His own Body and Blood and gave this blessed repast to the apostles for the nourishment of their souls. Then He said to them: "Do this for a commemoration of me" (*Luke*, XXII, 19). By these words the Son of God commissioned and empowered the apostles to continue to do what He had just done—that is, to change bread and wine into His Body and Blood for the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. By those same words Christ endowed the apostles with the chief priestly power—the power to offer sacrifice—because the Holy Eucharist was to be, not only the greatest sacrament of the Christian Church, but also an unbloody sacrifice.

A few days later Christ communicated to the apostles another office of their priesthood. Appearing to them in the glory of His risen humanity on Easter Sunday, He said: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (*John*, XX, 23). By these clear words the Son of God unequivocally attested that among the priestly powers of His apostles was contained the stupendous power of forgiving the transgressions of repentant sinners.

Just before His ascension Christ assigned to the apostles the commission to preach and to baptize, telling them to "go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (*Matthew*,

XXVIII, 19). Doubtless He had explained many other functions of their priestly office to the chosen band during the period of forty days intervening between His resurrection and His ascension, such as the administration of Confirmation and of Extreme Unction; for St. Luke tells us that during this time the Master frequently appeared to the apostles and spoke to them of the kingdom of God—that is, of the Church (*Acts*, I, 3).

The apostles began to exercise their priestly powers publicly on the tenth day following their Master's ascension, after they had received the supernatural light and strength of the Holy Ghost. They preached and baptized, and celebrated the rite of the Holy Eucharist. The faithful acknowledged in the apostles a spiritual power that came from the Son of God and made them, to quote St. Paul, "the ministers of Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God" (*I Cor.*, IV, 1).

The spiritual powers given to the apostles by our Lord can be divided into two classes—the power of jurisdiction, which embraced the authority to teach and to govern men, and the power of orders, which enabled these chosen disciples to administer the sacraments and offer sacrifice. It is the power of orders that, strictly speaking, constitutes the priesthood; and it is this power, rather than the power of jurisdiction, we are considering in this pamphlet.

The Successors of the Apostles

Jesus Christ willed that the Church which He established should continue until the end of time. In speaking of His Church, He made the solemn promise: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (*Matthew*, XVI, 18); and to the apostles, as the official teachers of His Church, He gave the explicit assurance: "Behold, I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world" (*Matthew*, XXVIII, 20). These definite promises of Him Who is Eternal Truth render it absolutely certain that the Church with all the essential

features with which He endowed it will endure as long as the human race inhabits the earth.

Since the first priests, the apostles, were mortal men, destined to pass away in a few years, it must have been Christ's intention that they should have successors in the priesthood, invested with the same priestly powers that the apostles themselves had received from their divine Master. This logical conclusion was clear to the apostles, as many passages of the New Testament indicate; for whenever they made converts and formed a local church they also chose one or several of the members of this new group of believers, and raised the man or men thus chosen to the dignity of the priesthood. Thus, St. Paul communicated the priestly office to Timothy in Ephesus, and to Titus in Crete. These men were expected to pass on the same spiritual power to others, for St. Paul in his letters to Timothy and to Titus gives detailed instructions as to the type of men they were to choose as priests.

As the years passed and the Church spread to all portions of the known world, the number of priests naturally increased to supply the needs of the growing Christian communities. But ever and always it was recognized that to be a priest of the Church of Jesus Christ one must receive the priestly power from a man who himself had received this power in its fulness from one of the apostles, either directly or through an unbroken chain of successors.

The Ceremony of Ordination

Christ conferred the priesthood on His apostles by a mere act of His will, without the instrumentality of an external ceremony. In other words, He used what is known in Catholic theology as His *power of excellence*—that is, the power to bestow the effects of the sacraments without employing the ordinary sacramental rites. At the Last Supper, our Lord gave the apostles the essential priestly power of offering sacrifice by merely willing to communicate this power to them, when He said: "Do this for a commemoration of me." By these same words the Son of God empowered the apostles to transmit the

priesthood to other men, since He wished the sacrifice of the New Law to be offered in commemoration of Him for all time. Thus our Lord made the apostles bishops by a single act of His will at the Last Supper.

The apostles themselves could not transmit the priesthood to other men by a mere internal act. They were obliged to make use of an external ceremony, the chief element of which was the laying on of hands. It was to this rite that St. Paul referred when he wrote to Timothy: "I admonish thee that thou stir up the grace of God which is in thee by the imposition of my hands" (*II Timothy,* I, 6). He mentions the use of the same ceremony by Timothy when he counsels the latter as to the selection of candidates for the priestly office: "Impose not hands lightly upon any man" (*I Timothy,* VI, 22).

This ceremony—the imposition of hands on the head of the candidate by one already possessing the fullness of Christ's priesthood—has been invariably employed in the Catholic Church to transmit the priestly office from apostolic times down to the present day. Moreover, this ceremony has always been regarded as one of the sacraments. It is true, this was not explicitly stated in the early centuries, because the word "sacrament" had not yet been given the precise meaning that it has today. However, the essential idea of a sacrament—an external rite capable of conferring grace as the instrument of the divine power—was always attributed to this ceremony of *ordination,* as it is called. Thus, St. Augustine places ordination in the same category with Baptism (*Against the Letter of Parmenian,* Book II, chap. 13, n. 28). St. John Chrysostom says: "This is ordination: the hand of man is imposed, but God works the entire effect, and it is His hand that touches the head of the one being ordained" (*Homily in the Acts of the Apostles,* XIV, 3). Indeed, we have the clear testimony of Scripture itself for the sacramental nature of ordination, for the words of St. Paul to Timothy (quoted above) making mention of "grace given by the imposition of hands" ascribe to this rite an efficacy that can belong only to a sacrament.

Since all the sacraments of the Christian Law were instituted by Christ, the rite of ordination must have originated with Him. The Bible does not tell us, however, when precisely our Saviour instituted this sacrament. This need not surprise us, since, as St. John asserts, "if all that Jesus did was committed to writing, the whole world would not be able to contain all the books that would then be written" (*John*, XXI, 25). Some theologians think that it was at the Last Supper that our Lord, after raising the apostles to the priesthood, explained to them that this sacred office was to be perpetuated by a sacramental rite. Others are of the opinion that it was in the course of the forty days intervening between the resurrection and the ascension that He prescribed that Holy Orders should be transmitted by a sacrament. It is also a disputed question whether Christ determined the precise nature of the ceremony to be employed for the administration of this sacrament, or gave the apostles and their successors in the government of the Church the right to choose an appropriate rite, and to modify it when and where they deemed a change feasible.

Different Grades of the Sacred Ministry

Up to the present we have referred to the priesthood established by Christ as if it gave equal spiritual powers to all who received it. It is true, the apostles—and probably also all their immediate successors in the priesthood—possessed the fullness of the priestly office. However, very early in the Christian era—certainly no later than the year 110—there were in the Church sacred ministers who possessed the chief priestly powers, especially the power to offer sacrifice, but did not enjoy all the spiritual powers that our Saviour included in the priesthood as He established it. In particular, these priests of the second rank could not give Confirmation, nor could they transmit the priesthood to others by the sacrament of Holy Orders. They were called *presbyteroi*—literally, *elders*—and are nowadays simply known as *priests*. Those who possessed the priesthood in its fullness were named *episcopoi*—literally, *overseers*—and are now called *bishops*.

Shortly after our Lord's ascension an order of sacred ministers inferior to priests was established. They were called *deacons*—literally, *servants*. These men could not consecrate the Holy Eucharist nor forgive sins. They were commissioned to perform certain other spiritual functions, especially to preach and to baptize. Hence, although not priests, the deacons possessed a small share of priestly power, and bore on their souls a limited portion of the indelible character of the priesthood. This order of deacons became a permanent element of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Thus, even from apostolic times the Church has had three distinct grades of sacred ministers—bishops, priests and deacons. In the third century other orders of a lower grade were established—the order of subdeacon and the minor orders. Whether these are merely ecclesiastical offices or are true participations of the sacrament of Holy Orders, will be discussed later.

CEREMONIES OF ORDINATION

Nature and Duties of the Different Orders

In that portion of the Catholic Church which uses the Roman rite there are eight grades of the sacred ministry. The possessors of these various orders, beginning with the lowest, are called respectively—porter, reader, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, priest, bishop. The first four of these grades are minor orders; the others are major orders.

The Minor Orders

The four minor orders—namely, the orders of porter, reader, exorcist and acolyte—are conferred on a young man preparing for the priesthood, usually two or three years before his priestly ordination. The ceremony by which these orders are given takes place during a Mass celebrated by the ordaining bishop. The Mass is interrupted immediately after the

*Gloria**. The bishop is seated, facing the candidates, whose names are then called, each answering "Present."

The ceremony for each order is the same in its general aspect. First, the bishop delivers an instruction and exhortation concerning the order and its duties. Then he gives each candidate an object symbolic of the chief functions of the order, saying at the same time an appropriate formula. The porter receives the keys of the church, while the bishop admonishes him: "So act as about to give an account of those things which are kept under these keys." Similarly, with a suitable form of words, the bishop consigns to the reader a book of lessons from Sacred Scripture; to the exorcist a book of exorcisms, to the acolyte an empty cruet and an unlighted candle in a candle-stick. The bishop concludes each ceremony by praying that God may assist the newly ordained clerics to perform faithfully their respective duties.

The chief functions assigned to those in minor orders are signified by the various objects conferred in the ordination ceremonies. The porter is deputed to guard the door of the church, admitting the worthy and excluding the unworthy. The reader is commissioned to read lessons from Sacred Scripture to the faithful and to catechize them. The exorcist is empowered to drive out devils from the possessed. The acolyte is authorized to prepare what is necessary for the holy sacrifice of the Mass especially to light the candles and set out the cruets of wine and water.

Before receiving the minor orders—usually several months or a year previously—the aspirant to the priesthood is given the clerical tonsure. This ceremony too is performed by the bishop, who cuts a few strands of the candidate's hair in the form of a cross, while the latter recites the verse from the fifteenth Psalm: "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; it is Thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me." Then the bishop invests the young man with the sur-

*On an Ember Saturday the conferring of the four minor orders is distributed according to the several lessons that are recited. Apart from such days in a Mass without a *Gloria* the minor orders are given immediately after the *Kyrie eleison*.

plice. This ceremony, although obligatory on all who intend to receive Holy Orders, is a rite of merely ecclesiastical institution, and not an order. It signifies the renunciation of the world and of its vanities, and the whole-hearted acceptance of the clerical state.*

The Subdiaconate

The subdiaconate, the lowest of the major orders in the Roman rite, is conferred after the collects of the Mass. The bishop begins by admonishing the candidates of the serious obligations annexed to this order, and especially of the perpetual chastity it imposes, and reminds them that they are still free to return to the world. He then invites them to step forward if they are resolved to undertake the burdens of the clerical state.** After they have signified in this manner their intention of accepting the subdiaconate, they prostrate on the ground and the Litany of the Saints is sung or recited. Then they rise to their knees, and the bishop, after delivering an instruction on the duties of the subdeacon, gives to each candidate a paten and an empty chalice, saying an appropriate formula. Then an assisting priest presents to be touched by each the cruets of wine and water, a basin and a towel. Afterwards the bishop invests them with the amice, the maniple and the tunic—the vestments proper to the subdiaconate and consigns to each the book of Epistles.*** Inspiring prayers are interspersed throughout the ceremony. Afterward, one of the newly ordained subdeacons reads the Epistle aloud with the bishop.

The principal function of the subdeacon is to minister at the solemn Mass by singing the Epistle, bringing the chalice and paten to the altar, presenting the wine and water, and washing the priest's hands. It is also one of his duties to wash the altar linen.

*The tonsure can be given outside of Mass. If it is conferred during Mass the ceremony takes place after the *Kyrie eleison* on an Ember Saturday or when there is a *Gloria;* before the *Kyrie eleison* on other days.

**This admonition and invitation are omitted in the case of religious, who already have made a vow of perpetual chastity.

***The clerics wear the alb and the cincture when they enter the sanctuary.

The Diaconate

The ordination of deacons takes place after the Epistle. An instruction is delivered by the bishop, and the candidates prostrate during the Litany of the Saints. Then, after several prayers, the bishop imposes his right hand on the head of each candidate, saying: "Receive the Holy Ghost that you may have strength, and be able to resist the devil and his temptations. In the name of the Lord." The bishop then clothes the young men with the stole and the dalmatic, and gives them the book of Gospels, with the words: "Receive the power of reading the Gospel in the Church of God both for the living and for the dead. In the name of the Lord. Amen." One of the new deacons then reads the Gospel of the Mass with the bishop.

The chief office of the deacon is to assist the priest at the solemn Mass, and to chant the Gospel. He can also preach, and under certain circumstances distribute Holy Communion and administer Baptism with all the ceremonies prescribed for the solemn administration of this sacrament.

The Priesthood

One of the most impressive functions in the Catholic Church is the ordination of a group of young men to the priesthood. The candidates enter the sanctuary vested in amice, alb, cincture, maniple and stole—this last being worn crosswise from the left shoulder, after the manner of deacons. Each carries folded on his arm a chasuble, the vestment proper to priests. The ordination takes place before the Gospel. When the bishop is seated, the candidates are presented by a priest in some official capacity, such as the rector of the seminary, who also attests their worthiness. The bishop addresses the young clerics on the dignity and the weighty responsibilities of the priesthood. Then, after the prostration and the Litany, the bishop lays both hands on the head of each candidate, and then all the priests present do the same. While all continue to hold their right hands over the kneeling clerics, the bishop recites several prayers, invoking the power and the

grace of the priesthood on them. Then the bishop crosses the stole on the breast of each, and confers the chasuble. However, this latter vestment is kept folded in back until after the communion. Next, while the hymn "Come Holy Ghost" is sung, the bishop anoints with blessed oil the hands of each candidate with an appropriate prayer. Finally, the bishop gives each a chalice containing wine and a paten with an unconsecrated host, saying: "Receive the power to offer sacrifice to God and to celebrate Masses both for the living and for the dead. In the name of the Lord."

The Mass is then resumed, and beginning with the Offertory the newly ordained clerics join in the prayers with the bishop, and simultaneously with him consecrate the Holy Eucharist for the first time, for they now possess the essential priestly power of offering the Holy Sacrifice. They receive Holy Communion under the form of bread only from the hands of the bishop. Afterwards they kneel before him, and he again imposes his hands on the head of each and unfolds the chasuble to its full length, saying: "Receive the Holy Ghost; whose sins thou shalt forgive they are forgiven them; and whose sins thou shalt retain they are retained." Finally, the young priests solemnly promise to reverence and to obey their lawful ecclesiastical superiors, and then receive from the bishop the kiss of peace.

Theologians are not in agreement as to the precise moment in the ordination ceremony when the power to consecrate the Holy Eucharist is conferred. Some think this takes place during the prayers that follow the first imposition of the bishop's hands; others believe that this great power is given only when the candidate receives the paten and the chalice. Again, it is a disputed question whether the power to forgive sins is given only when the bishop says: "Receive the Holy Ghost; whose sins thou shalt forgive, etc.," or whether this power is actually imparted with the power to consecrate, so that the ceremony after the communion is only intended to express clearly a power already given.

However, these discussions are of merely theoretical import, for in practice every bishop when conferring the priesthood is

careful to perform all the ceremonies most exactly. If through an oversight anything that might be essential were omitted or substantially modified, the rite would be repeated; for the Church demands that every reasonable precaution be taken to assure the valid ordination of her sacred ministers.

The chief supernatural powers of the priest are the two that are emphasized in the ordination rite—the power to consecrate bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ for the sacrifice and the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, and the power to forgive sins. In conjunction with these, other powers are given also—for example, to administer Extreme Unction, to be the ordinary minister of solemn Baptism, to give most of the blessings and sacramentals of the Church.

The Episcopate

As we stated above, the episcopate, or office of bishop, as established by Christ comprises a twofold power—the power of jurisdiction, which is the right to teach and to govern the faithful in spiritual matters, and the power of orders, which is the fulness of the priesthood. Both powers have come down in an unbroken succession from the apostles to the Catholic bishops of the present day. Normally, both are united in the same persons, but they can exist separately. Thus, a priest who is appointed bishop can take possession of his diocese before he is consecrated and in that case he has the episcopal power of jurisdiction, but not of orders. It could even happen that a cardinal who is not a bishop would be elected Pope*, in which case he would acquire the power of jurisdiction over the entire Church immediately on his acceptance, but would have to receive the episcopal power of orders from a bishop. On the other hand, an auxiliary bishop possesses the fulness of the power of orders but has not episcopal jurisdiction.

The ceremony of episcopal consecration, by which a priest becomes a bishop takes place during Mass before the Gospel

*This happened in the case of Pope Gregory XVI, who became Pope in 1831.

and is somewhat similar to a priestly ordination. It includes admonitions and prayers, the prostration of the candidate during the Litany, the laying on of hands by the consecrating bishops, the anointing of the head and of the hands of the new bishop with sacred chrism, and the giving of the book of Gospels, which is first placed on his shoulders and then in his hands. He also receives the crozier (a bishop's staff), the mitre and the gloves. The new bishop celebrates Mass with the chief consecrator. Ordinarily, three bishops confer episcopal consecration, joining together in all the ceremonies and words. However, the rite can be performed validly by one bishop, and the Pope sometimes permits a single bishop to officiate in regions where it would be difficult to obtain more. Thus, the first bishop in the United States, John Carroll, was consecrated at Lulworth Castle, England, in 1790 by Bishop Walmesley, no other bishops being present.

Besides possessing the powers proper to a priest, the bishop is also the ordinary minister of Confirmation and Holy Orders. There are also certain solemn functions, such as the consecration of a church and the blessing of a chalice, which are reserved to bishops. However, the reservation of these non-sacramental functions is a matter of merely ecclesiastical legislation; and the Church sometimes permits simple priests to officiate at such ceremonies.

The question is discussed by theologians whether one who is not a priest could be directly consecrated a bishop. The best solution seems to be this. The Church could by a single ceremony give the fulness of the priestly power to one not a priest, provided the ceremony by its wording and rites indicated that it was intended to confer all that the priesthood in its fullness implies—that is, not only the power to confirm and to ordain but also the power to celebrate Mass and to forgive sins. Indeed, in the early Church it seems not to have been unusual for deacons to have been raised to the episcopate by such a ceremony, without any distinct priestly ordination. But the ceremony of episcopal consecration that has been in use for many centuries is so formulated that evidently it is

intended to give only the distinctively episcopal powers to one already possessing the powers of a priest. Hence, it seems most probable that if this ceremony were performed over one who was not a priest it would give him no power of orders whatsoever*.

Holy Orders in the Oriental Rites

Among the Christians of Oriental rites, whether members of the Catholic Church or affiliated with an heretical or schismatic sect, the three orders of bishop, priest and deacon constitute the major orders. They are conferred by the imposition of hands, without the giving of any objects. The minor orders in most of the Oriental rites are only two in number—those of subdeacon and reader. These too are given by an imposition of the hands of the bishop.**

Which Orders are Sacraments?

Holy Orders is only one sacrament; yet, there is no repugnance in its being received in portions. Naturally the question arises: Is a portion of the sacrament of Holy Orders conferred in each of the ordination rites described above?

It is an article of Catholic faith that ordination to the priesthood is a sacrament. The Church has solemnly defined that ordination is a sacrament; and surely, if any rite is included in this definition it is that by which a man receives the supreme power of the Christian priesthood, the power to consecrate bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our Saviour. Whether or not episcopal consecration is a sacrament is uncertain. Some theologians hold that the episcopate is a sacramental order, and that the rite by which a priest becomes a bishop is a true sacrament, giving a character distinct from the character of the priesthood. Others hold that the episcopate is merely an amplification of the priesthood, and that episcopal consecration is a non-sacramental ceremony which only renders a priest capable of performing cer-

*However, a man could be ordained validly—though illicitly—to the *priesthood*, even though he had received no lower orders.

**In some of the Oriental Catholic rites, such as the Maronite the ceremonies of ordination are quite similar to those of the Roman rite.

tain spiritual functions of which he previously was incapable. At any rate, it is certain that bishops alone possess the fullness of the Christian priesthood, and hence are superior to priests in the power of orders. It is also certain that the ceremony of episcopal consecration is necessary for the conferring of the full priestly power.

All theologians agree that the ordination to the diaconate is a sacrament; and indeed the very nature of the ceremony indicates this, especially the solemn phrase: "Receive the Holy Ghost, etc." As to whether a portion of the sacrament of Holy Orders is given by ordination to the subdiaconate and to the minor orders, theologians disagree. Those who deny that these ceremonies are sacraments point to the fact that these orders came into existence only in the third century, and conclude from this that they lack one of the essential requisites of a sacrament of the New Law, institution by Christ. Those who hold that the ordinations to the subdiaconate and the minor orders are sacraments reply that our Lord can be said to have instituted these orders implicitly inasmuch as they are participations of the diaconate.

The theory broached by these latter theologians, in its complete form, is this: Christ Himself established explicitly only one great order, the priesthood, which He gave in its entirety to the apostles. However, He authorized the Church, if the rulers saw fit, to divide the priesthood into a number of grades, and to apportion a measure of the power and the grace of the priestly office to the recipients of the several orders through the rite of ordination. By virtue of this authorization the apostles instituted the order of deacons with a limited measure of the ministerial power. Later, the priesthood was divided into two grades, the possessors of which are respectively priests and bishops. In the third century, acting through this same delegation of Christ, the Church established the subdiaconate and the minor orders as further apportionments of the order of deacons.

This theory finds support in the authority of St. Thomas Aquinas, at least as regards the subdiaconate and the minor

orders, which he teaches are sacraments, but which he says were only implicitly contained in the diaconate in the early Church (*Supplement*, Q. 35, a.2; Q. 37, a.2, ad 2).

THE EFFECTS OF HOLY ORDERS

The effects of Holy Orders can be divided into two classes—first, those that are produced by the sacrament as Christ instituted it; second, those that have been annexed to certain orders by the Church. To the first class belong the sacramental character and grace; under the second class are grouped various obligations and privileges.

The Character of Holy Orders

It is an article of Catholic belief that the sacrament of Holy Orders imprints on the soul of the recipient an indelible spiritual mark, known as a character. From the discussion in the preceding section as to which of the orders are sacramental it is evident that it is a matter of faith that a character is conferred by the priestly ordination, and it is certain that a character is given when a man receives the diaconate. Whether episcopal consecration gives a new character or only endows the priestly character with new spiritual powers is uncertain; likewise, it is a matter of discussion among theologians whether or not characters are imparted by the ceremonies of ordination to the subdiaconate and the minor orders.

At any rate, theologians commonly teach that the different characters given by the various grades of the sacrament of Holy Orders, whatever be their number, do not remain separated on the soul, but blend into one. Thus, Holy Orders remains one sacrament, even though it is distributed throughout several ordination ceremonies.

All the sacramental characters—whether given by Baptism, Confirmation or Holy Orders—confer on the recipient a share in the priesthood of Christ. However, this participation in the priestly power and dignity of the Word Incarnate is given in a special degree by ordination to the priesthood, so that the

Catholic priest is sometimes said to be "another Christ." Hence, Catholics manifest an extraordinary reverence toward the priest, because in him they behold our Saviour Himself, busy with His work of bringing souls to God, as when He walked the ways of Galilee, nineteen centuries ago.

The character of Holy Orders, like the characters of Baptism and of Confirmation, can never be erased from the soul. Through human weakness a priest may sin grievously, and may even abandon the exercise of his priestly office; yet because of the indelible spirtual mark on his soul he remains a priest forever.

The Grace of Holy Orders

Every sacrament received by a person who places no impediment to its efficacy confers a twofold grace—sanctifying grace and sacramental grace. The former is a supernatural quality that imparts to the soul a new life which is, in a limited measure, a participation of the life of God Himself. The latter is a claim to those actual helps of God required that the recipient may attain to the end of the particular sacrament. This claim is attached to the sanctifying grace of the sacrament, and is proportionate to it.

Holy Orders was intended by Christ to give "second grace" —that is, an increase of sanctifying grace in a soul already possessing this divine quality in some measure—as distinct from "first grace," which is the infusion of sanctifying grace into the soul of a sinner, such as is effected by Baptism and Penance. For surely our Lord willed that a man should be in His friendship when admitted to a participation in His priesthood. Since the degree of sanctifying grace conferred by a sacrament is proportionate to the dispositions in the soul of the recipient, it is evident that a young man who has faithfully prepared himself for the sacred ministry by long years of diligent study and exemplary conduct must receive an abundant outpouring of sanctifying grace on the long-awaited day when the bishop imposes his hands upon him and ordains him a priest of the Most High.

The sacramental grace of Holy Orders is a claim to the supernatural light and strength which the cleric needs for the faithful fulfilment of the duties of his sacred office. The many obligations incumbent on a priest, the high ideals for which he must constantly strive, the multiplicity of tasks he is required to undertake for all types of persons—these require a prudence, a steadfastness, a courage, that merely human powers are inadequate to furnish. But from the sacramental grace of Holy Orders the priest can derive the superhuman assistance that will make him wise and strong and courageous in difficulties and temptations and dangers. People sometimes wonder what is the source of the fidelity to duty and of the constancy manifested by priests in critical circumstances. The solution is to be found in the special grace which the priest receives on the day of his ordination, and which goes down through the years of his life like a golden thread woven into a garment.

The sacramental grace of Holy Orders is given in special abundance to priests and bishops, on whom devolve the chief duties of the sacred ministry. However, some measure of grace is certainly given by the ordination to the diaconate, which is a sacrament. The reception of the subdiaconate and the minor orders also confers without doubt some special graces, for the ceremonies by which these orders are given, even though they may not be sacraments, are at least sacramentals, and procure for the recipients the precious fruits of the prayers of the Church.

Obligations of the Clerical State

One who has received Holy Orders is bound by the law of God to lead a life of greater perfection than is expected of the ordinary Christian. For every one is obliged to conform his conduct to his particular state, and surely there is no state so holy as that of the minister and earthly representative of Jesus Christ. Therefore, bishops and priests, and in proportionate degree those in the lower ranks of the clergy, must practice Christian virtue in a more excellent manner than is done by even the exemplary members of the laity. From this

principle theologians conclude that a young man who has been addicted to any serious vice, such as intemperance or impurity, cannot lawfully receive the major orders until the bad habit is completely eradicated.

Certain particulars concerning the manner in which clerics must practice virtue have been determined by the legislation of the Church. The two chief obligations of this nature imposed by the Church on her clergy are celibacy and the recitation of the divine Office.

In the first centuries of Christianity the clergy were not obliged to practice celibacy, although many voluntarily abstained from marriage in compliance with the advice of St. Paul (*I Cor.*, Chap. VII). During the fourth century the obligation of leading a celibate life was imposed on the clergy of the Latin rite. At first this law bound only bishops, priests and deacons but later it was extended to subdeacons. This law prescribes perfect chastity, and is violated not only by every sin against the sixth commandment, but also by the use of a marriage contracted before the cleric received orders.* Moreover, since the twelfth century a marriage attempted by a cleric of the Latin rite in major orders is not only unlawful but is also invalid.

There are many good reasons for clerical celibacy. Because of his freedom from domestic cares the priest can devote himself more unreservedly to the tasks of his ministry and especially to the work of foreign missions. When called to attend a person dying of a contagious disease he does not have to fear that he will endanger the lives of a wife and children. But the basic reason for clerical celibacy is the fact that one who leads a life of perfect chastity is thereby better disposed to give God a love that is unhampered by carnal affection for any human being. Christ Himself taught

*This last clause has been added because the Church sometimes permits a married man to become a priest while his wife is still living. Of course, such permission is not granted unless the wife freely consents, and there is assurance that she and her husband will permanently abstain from marital association. There is no law forbidding a man who has been once married and widowed from becoming a priest.

us the excellence of perfect chastity by word and by example. He was born of a virgin mother, and the disciple most dear to Him was the virginal St. John.

Among most of the Catholic peoples of the Oriental rites a married man may receive Holy Orders up to the priesthood inclusive, and continue to live in marital association with his wife. However, after receiving the subdiaconate a cleric may not marry.* Bishops however observe complete continence; and if a married man is made a bishop, he and his wife must separate.

The obligation of reciting the divine Office daily, like that of observing chastity, begins with the reception of the subdiaconate. The divine Office is a collection of prayers, most of which are taken from the Bible. The cleric in major orders says these prayers as an official of the Church, so that even when he reads the Office alone he is performing a public devotional act. The Office must be recited vocally—that is, the words must be pronounced with the lips and the tongue, and not be merely read through mentally.

Besides the obligations of celibacy and of the divine Office, the Church imposes certain other duties on the clergy. They must, at least under ordinary circumstances, wear clerical garb; and unless exempted (as they are in the United States), they must retain the mark of the clerical tonsure in the form of a disk-shaped shaven spot on the head. They must abstain from certain occupations, such as the practice of medicine and the administration of a secular business. These obligations begin with the reception of the tonsure.

Privileges of Clerics

There are two special privileges granted by the Church to clerics, known respectively as the privilege of the *forum* and the privilege of the *canon*. The former gives a right to immunity from civil courts. That is, no one may summon a

*It is sometimes asserted that an Oriental cleric is free to marry until he receives the *diaconate*. However, it is the practice of the Roman Congregations to forbid marriage even to subdeacons of the Eastern rites (Cappello *De Sacramentis*, III, 436.)

cleric to appear before a civil judge and all litigation against the clergy must be conducted through the ecclesiastical tribunals. As is evident, in a country where the Catholic Church enjoys no special recognition this privilege is not acknowledged by the civil law. Nevertheless, even in such a country a lay person who would bring a cleric before a civil court without the permission of the bishop would be subject to severe penalties. Any one who would violate in this manner the person of a high ecclesiastical dignitary, such as a bishop or a cardinal, would by that very fact incur excommunication (Canon 2341).

By virtue of the privilege of the canon any one who lays violent hands on a cleric is by that very fact excommunicated. The greater the dignity of the cleric, the more severe is the excommunication (Canon 2343). The privilege of the canon, as well as the privilege of the forum, is accorded to all who have received the clerical tonsure.

THE MINISTER AND THE RECIPIENT OF HOLY ORDERS

The ordinary minister of all grades of Holy Orders, and also of the clerical tonsure, is a bishop. This is easily proved from the unvarying custom of the Church dating from apostolic times. Indeed, as has been previously stated, the power to confer Holy Orders is one of the distinctive features of the episcopal office.

However, from the tradition and the practice of the Church we also know that a simple priest can be deputed by the Pope to give certain orders—at least the minor orders and the subdiaconate. At the present day, for example, any cardinal who is a priest, but not a bishop, can give the minor orders. With this delegation is also given the right to confer the clerical tonsure.

It is uncertain whether a simple priest can be delegated to ordain to the diaconate. However, all theologians agree that a priest cannot be empowered, even by the Sovereign Pontiff, to confer the priesthood or the episcopate.

even by the Sovereign Pontiff, to confer the priesthood or the episcopate.

A bishop retains his power to confer Holy Orders validly even though he is deposed from office or severs his connection with the Catholic Church. Thus, the bishops of the separated churches of the East—for example, the Greek Orthodox Church—which broke away from Catholic unity hundreds of years ago have continued to transmit the various orders, and accordingly the priests and bishops of these churches possess the same spiritual powers as the priests and bishops of the Catholic Church. It must be noted, however, that these churches have retained the same rites of ordination that they employed when they were united to the Catholic Church. Moreover, these separated Oriental Christians have constantly maintained the same belief in the nature of the Christian priesthood that they had when they were Catholics.

In this connection the question naturally arises why the Catholic Church does not recognize the validity of the orders conferred in the Established Church of England and in its daughter church, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States.

Anglican Orders

The members of the Anglican and Protestant Episcopal Churches contend that the orders of deacon, priest and bishop, conferred by their bishops communicate to their recipients the same sacred powers that are given by the corresponding orders in the Catholic Church. For, they argue, there has been an unbroken succession of ordinations and episcopal consecrations from the English bishops of the time of Henry VIII—who were certainly recognized by the Catholic Church as true bishops—down to the Anglican and Protestant Episcopal bishops of the present day.

The Catholic rejoinder to this claim is found in the Bull *Apostolicae Curae,* issued by Pope Leo XIII in 1896, declaring Anglican orders null and void. The first part of

this Bull is historical, narrating that since the very inception of the Anglican Church in the sixteenth century the Holy See has invariably regarded Anglican orders as invalid, so that any Anglican clergyman who was converted to Catholicism and wished to become a priest was obliged to receive Holy Orders *absolutely*—that is, without any condition which would imply a probability of their being valid. After this historical background the Pope sets forth the theological reasons for his decision—namely, defect of form and lack of intention on the part of the Anglican bishops.

The former of these two reasons is explained thus: The form of a sacrament, or the words used by the minister in conferring it, must express the specific purpose of the sacrament, or what it is primarily intended to impart to the recipient. Now, in the Edwardine Ordinal, which was used in the Anglican Church from 1550 to 1553, and again from 1559 to 1662, the form for the ordination of a priest made no mention of the specific purpose of the rite (the conferring of the priesthood) or of the essential power (to offer sacrifice) or grace of the priesthood. The words of the ordaining bishop were simply these: "Receive the Holy Ghost; whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained; and be thou a faithful dispenser of the word of God and of His holy sacraments." Similarly, in the form for the consecration of a bishop there was no mention of the episcopal office or of its essential powers, the words being only: "Receive the Holy Ghost and remember that thou stir up the grace of God that is given thee by this imposition of our hands; for God hath not given us the spirit of fear but of power and love and soberness". It is evident that the priesthood and the episcopate cannot be conferred by such forms.

It is true, in 1662 these two forms were supplemented (after "Receive the Holy Ghost") by the words "for the office and work of a priest" and "for the office and work of a bishop" respectively. But even if these words remedied the defect of form—which is very doubtful—they came too late, because for

more than a century the Edwardine Ordinal had been constantly employed with the aforesaid inadequate forms, so there were no longer in the Anglican Church any validly consecrated bishops.

The second reason given by the Pope for the invalidity of Anglican Orders—lack of intention—is explained thus: To administer a sacrament validly the minister must intend to confer it as Christ instituted it. If he intends *not* to give the Sacrament as our Lord established it, but to confer a rite that is essentially different, then certainly the sacrament is not given. Now the Anglican divines of the sixteenth century who compiled the Edwardine Ordinal clearly manifested by their writings and by the deletion of a great number of phrases from the old Catholic liturgical books that they rejected the doctrine that the Mass is a real sacrifice the offering of which is the chief function of the Christian priesthood.* Accordingly, they emphatically intended that the ceremony of priestly ordination which they drew up should *not* confer the power to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice, and that the rite of episcopal consecration should *not* give the power to ordain men to a sacrificing priesthood. And so, since the Anglican bishops who used the Edwardine Ordinal are presumed to have conformed their intention to the ideas it expressed, we logically conclude that they did not have the intention of conferring the priesthood and the episcopate as these orders were established by Christ.

Such in brief is the final verdict of the Catholic Church regarding the ordinations conducted according to the rites of the Anglican and the Protestant Episcopal Churches. It must be evident to every unbiased person that the case of the clergymen of these churches is entirely different from that of the priests and bishops of the Oriental non-Catholic churches. In these latter churches the ceremonies of ordination and consecration and the doctrines concerning the nature of the

*Like the Lutherans, they held the chief function of the priest to be the preaching of the Gospel (Messenger, *The Reformation, the Mass and the Priesthood).*

priesthood and of the episcopate have remained the same as when these churches were a portion of the Catholic Church. Hence, there is no difficulty about the validity of the ordinations performed in these churches, and when a non-Catholic Oriental priest becomes a Catholic, he is permitted to continue his priestly functions without being re-ordained. But Anglican Orders have been invalid from the beginning because of defect of form and lack of intention. Although those who have received them may sincerely believe that they are priests or bishops, and although God undoubtedly gives graces to them and to those to whom they minister in view of their good faith, yet the sacraments that require in the minister a priestly or episcopal power when conferred by them are null and void.

The Recipient

Only one of the male sex can validly receive the sacrament of Holy Orders; and that by divine law. Such has been the constant teaching of the Catholic Church, and it is implied in St. Paul's admonition: "Let women keep silent in the churches; for it is not permitted them to speak but to be subject" (*I Cor.*, XIV, 34). There was indeed in the early Church an order of deaconesses, into which women were inducted by a solemn rite; but they were never regarded as having received the sacrament of Holy Orders. They devoted themselves to such pious works as instructing women converts and visiting the sick.

To receive Holy Orders validly one must have been baptized; for it is a general principle of Catholic teaching that no other sacrament can be validly received before Baptism. A male child below the age of reason can be validly ordained, just as he can validly receive Baptism and Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist. However, the Church never permits the ordination of one who has not attained to the use of reason. One who has reached the age of reason must have the intention of being ordained, in order to receive Holy Orders validly.

Because of the great dignity of the clerical state the Church is careful to admit to Holy Orders only those whose physical, mental and moral qualifications render them competent to discharge the duties of the sacred ministry efficiently and decorously. Hence ecclesiastical legislation prescribes that certain defects—irregularities, they are called—prevent a person from lawfully receiving either major or minor orders or even the clerical tonsure, and also from lawfully exercising an order he may have already received.

Some of the irregularities imply no moral fault, but would render the performance of ecclesiastical functions difficult or impossible—such as blindness—or would detract from the honor due to the clerical state—such as illegitimate birth or the fact that a man has officiated as an executioner. Others arise from certain serious sins. For good reasons the Church will sometimes dispense a man from an irregularity, especially if it has come from no fault of his own.

The Church prescribes an adequate intellectual training for aspirants to the priesthood. Under ordinary circumstances a young man must devote at least eight years to study after completing the high-school course, before he can be ordained to the priesthood. Ecclesiastical legislation also stipulates that to receive the subdiaconate one must be at least twenty-one years old, the diaconate twenty-two, the priesthood twenty-four, the episcopate thirty. No definite age is prescribed for the reception of the tonsure and the minor orders, but before receiving them one must have begun the study of theology (Canons 975, 976).

Only a youth of upright character, purity of heart and zeal for souls should seek to become a priest. The conduct of those who are striving for this sublime goal is the object of great solicitude on the part of the Church and many papal pronouncements have been issued containing detailed instructions regarding the training of candidates for the priesthood.

Even though a young man may possess all the qualifications of body and of soul that are required in a priest, and even though he ardently desires to consecrate his life to the

sacred ministry, yet he cannot be said to have a vocation to the priesthood until he has been invited by his bishop—or, in the case of a religious, by his superiors—to receive Holy Orders. For, as we know from a decision of Pope Pius X (*Acta Ap. Sedis,* Vol. IV, p. 485), it is the call given by legitimate ecclesiastical superiors that constitutes the formal element of a priestly vocation.

Conclusion

The priesthood is a state of life demanding labor and sacrifice. It entails many hardships and sorrows of which the laity are unaware. Yet, it has its rewards—the eternal reward promised by Christ in the world to come, and even in this life the reward of knowing that through the priest's ministry the kingdom of God is being spread on earth.

The laity of the Catholic Church can render great assistance to their priests. In the first place, they can cooperate wholeheartedly with the efforts of their pastors and bishops. This is what constitutes Catholic Action—the cooperation of the laity with their priests and bishops in promoting the spiritual work of the Church. Secondly, the laity can and should help their priests by praying often for them. A very beautiful prayer that can be recited for a priest is the following:

Prayer For a Priest

"O Jesus, Eternal Priest, keep this thy servant within the shelter of Thy sacred Heart, where none may harm him. Keep unstained his anointed hands, which daily touch Thy sacred body. Keep unsullied the lips purpled with Thy precious blood. Keep pure and unearthly the heart sealed with the sublime mark of Thy glorious priesthood. Let Thy Holy love surround him and shield him from the world's contagion. Bless his labors with abundant fruit, and may the souls to whom he ministers be here below his joy and consolation, and in heaven his beautiful and everlasting crown. Amen."

Rev. Francis J. Connell, C.SS.R., S.T.D.,
Mount St. Alphonsus, Esopus, N. Y.

STUDY OUTLINE

HOLY ORDERS

Introduction

The Catholic priest is recognized as a man possessing unique power and authority. According to Catholics, this is the effect of the sacrament of Holy Orders.

The Origin of Holy Orders

(a) The first priest of the New Law was the God-man, Jesus Christ, who received the priesthood at the moment of His conception by the very union of His human nature with His divine personality. Christ exercised His priesthood during His mortal life, especially by offering the sacrifice of His life to His Father on the cross; and He continues to exercise His priestly power in heaven by interceding for mankind. He willed that others should participate in His priestly office; and accordingly He made His apostles priests, giving them the power to offer the eucharistic sacrifice, to forgive sins and to preach (*Luke,* XXII, 19—*John,* XX, 23—*Matthew,* XXVIII, 19). Immediately after our Lord's ascension the apostles began to exercise their priestly powers.

(b) Being an essential factor of the Church, the priesthood was intended by Christ to endure until the end of time. Accordingly, the apostles transmitted their priestly powers to other men, and they in turn to others, so that the priesthood of Christ has come down in unbroken succession to the present day.

(c) Though Christ Himself gave the priestly powers to the apostles by a mere act of His will, the apostles transmitted these powers by an external ceremony consisting chiefly of the imposition of hands. This ceremony, being an outward sign conferring grace, is one of the sacraments, and is known as Holy Orders. It has always been regarded by the Church as the necessary means of communicating priestly powers. Being a sacrament, it must have been established by Christ; but it is not known when precisely He instituted Holy Orders.

(d) From at least the beginning of the second century there have been two grades of priests—bishops and simple priests. The order of deacons, possessing a limited share of the priesthood, was established shortly after our Lord's ascension; and in the third century the order of subdeacons and the minor orders came into being.

Ceremonies of Ordination; Nature and Duties of the Different Orders

(a) The bishop confers the minor orders of porter, reader, exorcist and acolyte by giving the candidate an object symbolic of the particular office while reciting an appropriate formula. Those who have received minor orders are empowered to perform certain inferior functions in ecclesiastical ceremonies. Before he is elevated to the minor orders a cleric receives the tonsure—an ecclesiastical rite signifying detachment from the world.

(b) In conferring the order of subdeacon the bishop gives the candidate a paten and an empty chalice, and afterward the book of Epistles, pronouncing appropriate formulas. The principal function of the subdeacon is to minister at the solemn Mass by singing the Epistle, bringing the chalice and paten to the altar, and presenting wine and water.

(c) The order of deacon is conferred by the imposition of the bishop's hands and the giving of the book of Gospels to the candidate with suitable words. The chief powers of the deacon are to assist the priest at the solemn Mass, to sing the Gospel and to preach. He is sometimes delegated to baptize solemnly and to administer holy communion.

(d) The most important ceremonies of ordination to the priesthood are the imposition of the bishop's hands with an appropriate formula, the giving to the candidate of the paten with a host and the chalice with wine with the words: "Receive the power to offer sacrifice, etc.", and another imposition of hands with the words: "Receive the Holy Ghost. Whose sins thou shalt forgive, etc." Which of these rites are essential to the conferring of the priesthood is uncertain. It seems probable that Christ has allowed the Church to determine the specific matter and form of Holy Orders. The chief powers of the priest are two—to offer sacrifice by consecrating the Holy Eucharist and to forgive sins.

(e) The rite by which a priest is consecrated a bishop includes the imposition of hands, the giving of the book of Gospels and the conferring of the episcopal insignia. A bishop is superior to a simple priest chiefly by the power to confirm and to ordain, as ordinary minister.

(f) In the Oriental rites all the orders are conferred by the imposition of hands and appropriate words.

(g) The priesthood and the diaconate are certainly sacramental orders. Whether the episcopate is a sacramental order distinct from the priesthood is uncertain. It is also a disputed point whether the subdiaconate and the minor orders are participations of Holy Orders or merely ecclesiastical institutions.

The Effects of Holy Orders

(a) The sacrament of Holy Orders imprints on the soul an indelible character, which is an exalted participation of Christ's priesthood and permanently empowers the recipient to perform the duties of the Christian ministry.

(b) Holy Orders, worthily received, imparts sanctifying grace and a special sacramental grace, including a claim to the divine helps necessary to the recipient for the worthy performance of his sacred ministry.

(c) The clerical life imposes grave obligations, including in the Latin Church the obligation of perpetual chastity and the duty of reciting the divine Office. These obligations begin with the subdiaconate. In most of the Oriental rites married men may become priests and continue to live with their wives, but a man may not marry after he has received the subdiaconate.

(d) The Church grants various privileges to clerics, especially the privileges of the forum and the canon.

The Minister and the Recipient of Holy Orders

(a) Only a bishop can be the ordinary minister of the major and minor orders; but a simple priest can be delegated by the Pope to confer the minor orders and the subdiaconate—possibly even the diaconate. Even a bishop separated from the Catholic Church can ordain *validly* if he has the proper intention and observes the prescribed rites.

(b) The orders conferred in the Anglican and Episcopalian churches are held to be *invalid* by the Catholic Church because for more than a century the form and the intention of the officiating bishops were gravely defective.

(c) By divine law only a male can receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. For the *validity* of the sacrament he must have been baptized. By ecclesiastical law to receive Holy Orders *lawfully* he must be free from irregularities. The candidate must possess suitable intellectual and moral qualifications, and must have the intention of devoting his life to the sacred ministry. The *formal* element of a priestly vocation is the call to the priesthood, given to the candidate by his bishop or equivalent ecclesiastical superior.

Conclusion

The priestly life involves great sacrifices, but it also brings great consolations. The laity should assist their priests by cooperating with their labors and by praying for them.

CHRIST IS GOD

By Rev. [illegible] LOUIS [illegible] Ph.D.

[illegible] must [illegible] can say
[illegible] was [illegible] was God.
Therefore Christ is God.

•

It is on the historical fact of the Resurrection, the climax of all that Christ said and did, that our belief in the divinity of Christ rests solidly and serene. Christ died on a cross because He was man. Christ rose from the dead because He was God as well as man.

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Christ in His mercy has given us the Sacrament for the [redacted]

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[redacted]

[redacted]

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Matrimony

By

Rev. FRANCIS CONNELL,
C.SS.R., S.T.D.

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MATRIMONY

BY REV. FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

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Introduction

ONE of the most fundamental and most important institutions of the human race is marriage. The strength and the progress of a nation depend in great measure on the type of family life that prevails among its citizens. This in turn depends on the ideas concerning marriage which are held and put into practice by the people of the nation. Where there is deep reverence for the marital state, and its obligations are faithfully fulfilled, there will be found a high standard of morality, peace and security. On the contrary, where the sacred dignity of marriage is rejected and the important duties of the conjugal state are set at naught, vice of all kinds will abound, and discord and misery will prepare the way for the ruin of the nation.

Today in the United States respect for marriage and regard for its laws seem to be rapidly disappearing. Marriages are hastily contracted and just as hastily dissolved. In novels, on the stage and the motion picture screen the most sacred features of matrimony are held up to ridicule. The relations between husband and wife, which should exemplify the noblest type of human love, are regarded by many as nothing more than a means of self-indulgence. This condition is bound to work havoc with the moral fibre and the civic vitality of America unless it is effectively remedied.

In view of these circumstances the doctrines of the Catholic Church relating to marriage should be carefully studied. These doctrines have been taught by the Church for nineteen centuries. When put into practice they have proved the most effective bulwark against social decadence and the most potent factor in fostering the moral vigor of the individual, the family and the state.

It is the purpose of this pamphlet to explain the teachings of the Catholic Church on Marriage under four general headings—first, marriage as a natural institution; second, the sacrament of Matrimony; third, the unity and the indissolubility of marriage; fourth, Church legislation on marriage.

MATRIMONY

BY REVEREND FRANCIS CONNELL, C.SS.R., S.T.D.

MARRIAGE AS A NATURAL INSTITUTION

By *marriage* or *matrimony* is signified: first, a contract of a determined nature between a man and a woman; second, the state or permanent conditon of the two resulting from this contract. We shall consider marriage, merely as a natural institution, from both these aspects.

The Contract of Marriage

Marriage as a contract is a mutual and free agreement between a man and a woman by which each transfers to the other the right of using his or her body respectively for the purpose of legitimate sexual association as well as the other rights proper to the conjugal state. Some materialistic philosophers and historians have claimed that the idea of a formal and binding agreement between man and woman as the basis of sexual relations developed only gradually in the consciousness of mankind, and that in the beginning of the human race carnal intercourse was of an entirely promiscuous and casual nature. Of course, one of the pronounced tendencies of materialistic philosophy is to drag man down to the level of the beast. However, the outstanding scholars of the present day agree that as long as the race of men has inhabited the earth sexual union has been recognized as legitimate only after the two parties have entered into some manner of compact.

One who is either physically or mentally incapable of making a contract whereby the conjugal rights are transferred is incapable of being married. Thus, one who is permanently devoid of the physical power of sexual union can never enter the matrimonial state.* Again, one who is so intoxicated that he does not know what he is doing might go through the ceremony of marriage, yet he would not be married, because a contract can be entered into only by a person in possession of his intellectual faculties. Furthermore, there must be true *internal* consent in both parties. Thus, if a woman is subjected to such terrifying threats that she externally gives and accepts conjugal rights, while in reality she does not intend to give consent, there is no marriage.**

The subject matter of the marriage contract is the mutual right to conjugal relations, and to all that is normally connected with them such as love, assistance, cohabitation. For the primary purpose of marriage is the generation and the bringing up of children. Every intelligent person must realize that the sexual powers are chiefly ordained to bring new life into existence. The personal gratification attached to the use of these powers is only nature's allurement to insure their being used sufficiently widely to propagate the human species. From this self-evident fact can be seen the grave intrinsic malice of the vice known as birth-control. Those who commit this sin deliberately frustrate the primary purpose of a very important social act, and exercise it solely for their own selfish gratification. They take the recompense that nature has destined for those who are willing to cooperate toward propagating the human race, yet, at the same time deliberately refuse their cooperation. It is to be noted that all this is based on the very essence of marriage as nature has

* It is to be noted that we are here speaking of permanent physical impotence, for that which is of a transient nature does not of itself nullify the marital contract—for example, in a young person who has not yet acquired the requisite bodily development.

** This case is different from that to be found on page 26 under impediment 7.

established it, independently of all positive legislation. The prohibition to practice birth-control is therefore not a law of the Catholic Church—it is a law of nature itself.

The primary purpose of marriage includes not only the generation of children but also their bringing up. Here again nature is our instructor. Natural instinct dictates that those who have given life to children shall care for them until they are able to care for themselves. Even the most savage beasts exhibit a tender love and a self-sacrificing solicitude for their young. In the case of human offspring this bringing up implies not only the providing for their bodily wants but also an active interest in their intellectual and moral training. Hence parents who devote themselves so continually to amusements and to social functions that they have little time to spend on the character building of their children are seriously failing in one of the essential duties of the conjugal state, even though they may be furnishing their boys and girls with all that promotes their physical comfort and worldly advantages.

Marriage has other ends besides the generation and the bringing up of children, such as the charm of sympathetic companionship, the joys of ardent love, the mutual assistance that a devoted man and woman can render each other, the alleviation of the vehement inclinations of human nature. These ends, though secondary, can be lawfully sought, provided the primary end of marriage be not positively frustrated. It must not be thought that the Catholic attitude toward marriage is devoid of sentiment. On the contrary, the Church sees in marriage the blossoming of one of the fairest flowers of love that can take root in the human heart—the love of youth and maiden in the springtime of life. True love is unselfish, more ready to give than to receive, and this is the type of love the Church commends to all who have decided to walk the pathway of life hand in hand. There are trials and hardships and disillusionments in every marriage, and the man and woman who have become husband and wife

merely through sentimental affection or transitory passion will drift apart when these frail bonds have snapped. But that deep love which is based on a mutual appreciation of each other's qualities of soul will grow stronger in hours of pain and of sorrow, and with the passing of the years will become more spiritual and more generous.

Since marriage is a contract between human beings, the consent of both parties must be *externally manifested.* This can be done, not only by word of mouth (the ordinary way) but also by signs or gestures or even by written communications. In fact, as far as the *natural law* is concerned, a man and a woman can be married to each other when they are far apart, either by the transmission of letters containing the mutual marital pledges, or through delegates who will meet and make the marriage contract in the name of their principals. This last kind of marriage ceremony—by proxy, as it is called—was quite common in the middle ages, especially between royal personages, on account of the dangers and difficulties connected with travel. Even now the Church law permits marriage by proxy if certain conditions are fulfilled.

Since marriage has for its principal end the common good of society through the propagation and the rearing of offspring, the marital contract must be subject to the legislation of some public authority in such wise that if the laws made by this authority, within the limits of the divine law, concerning the qualifications of those who contract marriage, the ceremonies to be observed, etc., are not obeyed, the contract is null and void. In the case of baptized persons the competent public authority is the Church. For unbaptized persons, who are not subject to the Church, the authority empowered to legislate for the matrimonial contract is the civil government. Thus, in a State where the civil law declares the marriage of a white person and a negro null and void, two unbaptized persons who would marry in defiance of this statute would not contract a true marriage.

Marriage as a State

When a man and a woman have made a lawful marital contract they place themselves in a permanent state which brings with it certain definite rights and duties and is endowed with certain qualities. The principal rights and duties concern sexual relations as intended by nature. Each may require these relations from the other, each is obliged to give them at the other's reasonable requests. A married person may forfeit these rights—especially by illicit union with a third party—without thereby impairing the indissolubility of the marital bond. In such a case the injured spouse may refuse the guilty party his or her marital privileges—always supposing that the fact of the transgression has been proved with certainty. However, if the erring one repents and promises amendment, it is usually better for the other partner to condone the wrong and to admit the repentant one to the full rights of marital cohabitation.

Mutual love, loyalty, confidence, assistance—these too are obligations of the matrimonial state. Under ordinary circumstances husband and wife should live together; although at times this may involve hardships on the part of the wife, especially when the husband's employment obliges him to move frequently or to take up his abode in a lonely or uncivilized region. Yet, generally speaking, the wife must follow her husband. In fact, it is a principle of the married state that the chief authority in the household is vested in the husband. This does not mean that he is allowed to exercise despotic power over his wife and children, demanding the gratification of his every whim and fancy. His rule should be reasonable; before making important decisions affecting the family circle he should consult his wife; he should sustain her authority in the training of the children. But the principle, expressed so frequently today, that both parties in marriage should be perfectly equal, is utterly absurd. In every organized social unit, even though it be only a small family, there must be one head, and nature dictates that

under normal circumstances the head of the household be the father and husband.

The essential qualities of the matrimonial state are two—unity and indissolubility. These will be considered later.

The Catholic Church has always taught that the state of marriage is something lawful and honorable. This is also a dictate of reason; for since the Creator established the diversity of sexes and the mode of sexual union as the means of propagating the human race, marriage must be in conformity with His will and accordingly something morally good. There were in former centuries some religious sects—for instance, the Manichaeans and the Albigensians—who held that the human body has been produced by the spirit of evil and that consequently the use of the bodily functions for procreation is intrinsically evil. The Catholic Church condemned these errors and declared that all things in the universe, both spiritual and corporeal, have been created by God and the use of the sexual faculties according to the designs of the Creator cannot be sinful.

Catholics believe, moreover, that even as a natural institution marriage is something holy. For through marriage the husband and wife cooperate with the Almighty in bringing into the world human beings destined for an everlasting life of happiness beyond the grave. On this account God has always manifested an extraordinary providential care over the matrimonial state. He imparted a special blessing to the first husband and wife, Adam and Eve (*Genesis,* I, 28). He promulgated an extensive code of matrimonial laws for the preservation of the dignity and holiness of marriage among the Jewish people (*Leviticus,* XVIII). Even those marriages that are not of a sacramental nature—the marriages of unbaptized persons—are sacred unions, enriched with the blessing of the Most High. But far more sublime is the marriage that has been elevated by Jesus Christ to the dignity of a sacrament of the Christian dispensation. It is under this aspect that we shall now consider marriage.

THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

As we saw in the preceding section, marriage even from the beginning of the world was something holy, enjoying the special protection and blessing of God. Under the Christian law, however, marriage has acquired a new dignity in that it has become a sacrament. This is a doctrine that has been solemnly defined as an article of faith by the Catholic Church. The Oriental churches separated from Catholic unity, and embracing about 120,000,000 communicants, concur with the Catholic Church in venerating matrimony as a true sacrament. The majority of Protestants* while ascribing a measure of holiness to marriage, do not classify it among the sacraments.

Christian Matrimony a Sacrament

A sacrament is an external, symbolic ceremony, established by our Saviour Jesus Christ for the purpose of sanctifying human beings. Or, to put it more briefly, a sacrament is a visible sign of invisible grace. Catholics hold that the sacraments are seven in number. These seven rites possess an inherent power, communicated to them by God, whereby they can impart grace to the soul of the recipient, provided he places no impediment to their efficacy. In other words, the sacraments do not sanctify merely by stimulating those who participate in them to good and meritorious acts; they produce sanctity of themselves as instruments of the divine omnipotence.

Some of the sacraments are described in detail, and their sacramental nature unequivocally affirmed, in the pages of the New Testament—for example, Baptism. Others are referred to in the written word of God only meagerly and in terms that are not very definite. Among these latter is Matrimony. Indeed, there is only one passage in the Bible which furnishes us with an argument that Christian marriage is a

* Some members of the Anglican Church admit the sacramentality of Christian marriage.

sacrament; and that is only by implication which is not entirely convincing. The passage occurs in the fifth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, wherein the apostle emphasizes the duties of Christians in the married state. He does this by comparing the union between husband and wife to the union between Christ and the Church: "The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church. Therefore, as the Church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be to their husbands in all things. Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the Church . . . This is a great sacrament, but I speak, in Christ and in the Church" (*Ephesians,* V, 23-32). Now, from these words, we argue thus: The union between Christ and His Church is something very sublime and holy; it is an unfailing source of divine grace for the members of the Church. If then, the union between husband and wife is like the union between Christ and the Church, it, too, must be sublime and holy, and a channel of divine grace to the married couple—in a word, it must be a visible sign of invisible grace, or a sacrament.*

Full certainty of the sacramentality of Christian marriage is furnished, however, by the tradition of the Church extending back to the earliest days of the Christian era. It must always be remembered that the Bible does not contain all the truths revealed to mankind. There are some doctrines which are found only in the unwritten word of God—tradition—having been communicated to the Church by Christ or by the apostles as divinely inspired only through word of mouth. Such doctrines are to be believed with the same measure of divine faith as those contained in the Scriptures, for like the latter they are based on the authority of the Most High. Now, among the teachings of tradition can be found the doctrine that Christian marriage is a sacrament. Thus, Origen who lived in the third century wrote: "Inasmuch

* It is to be noted that we do not argue to our conclusion from the use of the word *sacrament* in this text of St. Paul. For this word as employed by the apostle has only the sense of "a sacred and mysterious thing," and not the definite sense that we now apply to it.

as God is the author of this union (marriage), grace resides in those who are united by God. Well aware of this, St. Paul declares that matrimony according to the word of God is a grace" (*Commentary in St. Matthew,* tom. 14, n. 16). St. Cyril of Alexandria in the fifth century declared, when speaking of the marriage feast of Cana: "Christ was present, not to feast but to work a miracle, and thereby to sanctify the very foundation of human procreation" (*Commentary in St. John,* Chap. II). St. Augustine compared the state of Christian matrimony to the priesthood (*On the Blessings of Marriage,* Chap. 24, n. 32). On the walls of the ancient catacombs are pictures representing Christ Himself giving His blessing to a bridal couple. All Christian antiquity testifies that marriage was ever regarded as a holy and symbolic rite, possessing the power to confer grace—in a word, as a sacrament.

Since our Lord established all the sacraments, He must have enhanced matrimony with the dignity of a sacrament sometime during His earthly life. Tradition does not tell us precisely when He did this. Some think this took place at the marriage feast of Cana; others believe it occurred when He laid down the law of the indissolubility of marriage (*Mark,* X, 11-12); others attribute this event to the period of forty days between the resurrection and the ascension.

It is supremely fitting that there should be a sacrament of Matrimony. Married life, with its many obligations and responsibilities, its sorrows and its cares, calls for special graces to strengthen husband and wife and to link them together with an unbreakable bond of supernatural love. How conformable it is, therefore, to our divine Redeemer's loving solicitude for the needs of mankind that He should constitute the very marriage contract itself one of His seven special channels of grace for the help and consolation of those who enter the conjugal state!

What an exalted concept of marriage prevails in the Catholic Church! The union of Christian husband and wife

is lifted above the plane of the flesh into the realm of the spirit. Their wedded life is a vivid representation of the mystic union that exists between the Son of God and His earthly spouse, the Church. The natural blessing of marriage, sons and daughters to bring happiness to the advancing years of their parents, has a supernatural significance in Christian marriage in that these children are destined ultimately to be citizens of Christ's heavenly kingdom.

Matter and Form, Recipient and Minister

Every sacrament is composed of two elements known respectively as the matter and the form. The matter is something undetermined, like the pouring of water in Baptism, which can be done for many purposes. The form is the determining element, like the words spoken by the one baptizing, which designate the precise purpose of the pouring, the spiritual purification of the recipient.

Before applying these distinctions to Matrimony, we must recognize a very important principle. When we say that Matrimony is a sacrament we do not mean that a sanctifying factor has been *superadded* to the contract of Christian marriage. We mean that by the will of Christ every matrimonial contract of two baptized persons is *in itself* an efficacious means of conferring grace—that is, a sacrament. Accordingly, whenever two baptized persons enter into a valid marriage, they also, by that very fact, receive the sacrament of Matrimony. We say *baptized* persons, because Baptism must be received before one is capable of *validly* receiving any other sacrament. But we also say that *all* valid marriages of two baptized persons are sacraments, *whether they be Protestants or Catholics,* because Christ Himself has inseparably identified the marital contract of baptized persons with the sacrament of Christian Matrimony. We speak explicitly of the marriage of *two* baptized persons, because when a baptized person marries one who is unbaptized—presuming, of course, that if the former is a Catholic a dispensation has been obtained—

though the marriage is valid and sacred, it is not a sacrament even for the baptized party.

When two married persons, who were not baptized before their marriage, receive Baptism afterward, their marriage, according to the more common theological view, immediately becomes a sacrament. Similarly, if only one was baptized at the time of the marriage, the union is elevated to the dignity of a sacrament as soon as the other receives Baptism.

From the principle that the marriage contract is identical with the sacrament we can conclude to the matter and form of Matrimony. In every contract there is an indetermined element, the mutual giving of something to the other party; and there is also a determining element, the acceptance by each party of what the other gives. In the marital contract the indetermined element is the giving of the conjugal rights by each to the other. The determining element is the acceptance by each of the rights given by the other. Consequently, since the contract and the sacrament are identical, theologians logically conclude that the matter of Matrimony is the giving of the conjugal rights to the other party, and the form is the accepting of these rights from the other.

Accordingly, the contracting parties themselves administer the sacrament, each one conferring it on the other. It is true that when at least one of the couple is a Catholic the Church requires that under ordinary circumstances the marriage ceremony take place in the presence of a priest; otherwise the marriage is null and void. But the priest is not the *minister* of the sacrament—he is present only to act as the Church's official witness and to bestow her blessing on the newly wedded pair.

From this it also follows that when two baptized Protestants are married—for example, in the presence of their minister or before a civil official—they give and receive the sacrament of Matrimony just as truly as two Catholics who are married in the presence of their priest. For, as was stated, the valid marriage contract of every baptized pair is necessarily a sacra-

ment. Hence, Catholics behold in the marriages of their Protestant friends a sacred dignity that the Protestants themselves do not admit.

All that is required for the *valid* reception of the sacrament of Matrimony is that a person be baptized and contract a true marriage with another baptized person. However, to receive this sacrament *fruitfully*—that is, with its graces—some dispositons of soul are necessary. Matrimony is one of the sacraments of the living. It presupposes that those who receive it are already living the supernatural life of grace, and it is destined to increase this grace in their souls. Therefore, one in sin is obliged to acquire the state of grace before being married. Strictly speaking, it suffices that for this end a person make an act of perfect contrition with the intention of confessing his sins later. It is always better, however, to seek the pardon of one's sins in the sacrament of Penance. In fact, a person who is going to receive Holy Communion on the occasion of his marriage—as is done by every practical Catholic—must go to confession and receive sacramental absolution if he has any mortal sin not yet confessed and absolved.*

One who would knowingly receive the sacrament of Matrimony in mortal sin would thereby commit the grievous sin of sacrilege. However, theologians generally teach that if one in mortal sin receives this sacrament without being conscious of the wrong he is doing, and at the same time has imperfect contrition—attrition, as it is often called—for his mortal sins, he will be granted in God's goodness the pardon of these sins and the great gift of divine grace.

The Effects of Matrimony

Every sacrament, when worthily received, confers both sanctifying grace and a special sacramental grace, which latter enables the recipient to attain more perfectly the end of the

* Church law prescribes that the pastor shall strongly urge those about to be married to go to confession and receive Holy Communion before the marriage.

particular sacrament, imparting to him a claim to God's actual graces necessary for this purpose. Matrimony is intended to give an increase of sanctifying grace to one already possessing this divine quality, though in the exceptional case mentioned above it can give grace to one in sin. The measure of the grace granted through this sacrament is proportionate to the degree of fervor with which one has prepared for its reception. What a tragic perversion of God's designs when young people before entering marriage, instead of living a more holy life than previously, give themselves more freely to grievous sins!

The special sacramental grace of Matrimony is directed toward enabling the recipients to fulfill faithfully the obligations of the conjugal state. By virtue of this grace they receive abundant helps from God during their entire lifetime, provided they show themselves worthy of this divine assistance. And so, like a heavenly alchemy the grace of this holy sacrament permeates the life of the good Christian couple, changing into the gold of eternal treasure the deeds of loving self-sacrifice, the daily trials patiently and cheerfully borne, the joys and the sorrows, the hopes that are realized and the hopes that are frustrated. Each of the thousands of little duties and tasks that make up married life can find its needed heavenly grace in the sublime sacrament that joins husband and wife together in a union like to that between Christ and the Church.

It is the wish of the Church that her members be married at a Mass. Thus, in the first moments of their wedded life they have Christ with them, on the altar and in their hearts, as of old He was present to the bridal couple in Cana of Galilee. On such an occasion a special Mass—the nuptial Mass, it is called—is celebrated. The bride receives a special blessing which ordinarily can be given only when the marriage takes place at Mass.

THE UNITY AND THE INDISSOLUBILITY OF MARRIAGE

The two essential properties of marriage, inherent in the matrimonial state by the natural law and by the positive law of God, are unity and indissolubility.

Unity of Marriage

By the unity of marriage or monogamy is meant that the conjugal union of *one* man and *one* woman is the only form of matrimony conformable to the law of nature. Opposed to this quality is polygamy, which is specifically either polygyny (a plurality of wives) or polyandry (a plurality of husbands).* Unquestionably, polygamy is contrary to the natural law. Normally in a polygamous union the whole-hearted love of husband and wife which is so important a factor in the matrimonial state is impossible; domestic peace is destroyed; the spiritual ends of marriage are subordinated to gross carnal gratification. Besides these arguments from reason against polygamy we have the words of God Himself proclaimed through the lips of our first parent Adam, and later repeated by Christ, describing the ideal conjugal union as existing between *two* persons only: "They shall be *two* in one flesh" (*Genesis,* II, 24—*Matthew,* XIX, 5).

Nevertheless, God Himself gave a dispensation for polygamy in the pre-Christian era. To understand this matter we must remember that the precepts of the natural law are divided into various classes by reason of the purpose to which they are directed. Some are directly intended to safeguard the dignity and the rights of God, such as the prohibition to blaspheme. Others are directly intended to procure benefits for creatures and to help them attain to the purpose

* In technical theological language the term *successive polygamy* is sometimes used in reference to a person who marries again after the death of a previous husband or wife. This of course is not forbidden by God's law. In the present discussion however we are speaking of simultaneous polygamy, which means that the several wives or husbands are living at the same time.

of their existence, such as the prohibition to murder or to steal. God could never give a dispensation from a precept of the former kind, because He would thus be acting against Himself. As to the second class of precepts, we must make another distinction. Some are necessary for the attainment of the *primary* purpose of a creature or of some human institution in the present life. Others are directed to the procuring of only a *secondary* purpose of a created thing. An example of the former is the prohibition to kill an innocent person, which safeguards the chief temporal good of man, life. From such a natural precept God could give a dispensation at most only in a particular case. An example of the other type is the prohibition of polygamy—or, to be most exact, polygyny or plurality of wives—which safeguards domestic peace, harmony, love, the secondary objects of marriage. From a precept of this kind God can give even a general dispensation in order to procure more effectively the primary end of the creature or to help it attain to a supernatural end. Thus, it is generally held that the reason why the Almighty dispensed from the unity of marriage before the time of Christ was to promote more rapidly the propagation of the human race.

Accordingly, when Abraham, Jacob, David and other great men of the Old Testament are said to have had a number of wives, the statement is to be understood literally, as referring to a plurality of real marriages. The gentiles too participated in this dispensation, according to the more common theological view. Thus, Queen Esther was the real wife of the gentile King Assuerus, although he had several previous wives (*Esther,* I-II). The dispensation for polygamy was given only after the deluge—some think immediately afterward, others think only with Abraham.

This dispensation allowed only *polygyny* (plurality of wives)—not *polyandry* (plurality of husbands). Indeed, this latter is opposed to the primary purpose of marriage, frequently rendering a woman sterile and—in case a child is

born—making him uncertain as to who is his father on whom he can depend for his bringing up. Accordingly, God could not give a general dispensation for polyandry. It is uncertain if He could do so even in a particular case.

Under the New Law the divine dispensation for polygamy has ceased entirely. This violation of matrimonial unity is forbidden even by civil statutes in all civilized countries. The nearest approach to the opposite in recent years took place in the State of Utah where the government tolerated polygamy for about fifty years, until 1890.

Indissolubility of Marriage

The other quality of marriage, indissolubility, signifies that once it has been entered into, the conjugal union lasts until the death of one of the parties. The intrinsic reason for this law of nature is the fact that parents have the obligation of bringing up their children by their united efforts. This is a task that requires many years. Under normal conditions the married couple are advanced in years when all their offspring are capable of taking care of themselves. Surely, nature intends that their partnership shall remain undissolved when the evening of life draws near and they stand in so great need of each other's love and consoling companionship.

Furthermore, the prospect of a possible divorce robs the association of husband and wife of much of the joy and security that should be the natural atmosphere of wedlock. Divorce provides a powerful incentive to conjugal infidelity, tends to lower matrimony to the level of a mere business partnership and degrades womanhood. Yet, in some parts of the United States today it is almost as easy to obtain a divorce as it is to buy a railroad ticket! Every year more than 150,000 divorces are granted within the boundaries of our country—one to about every six marriages. Surely, such a condition cannot fail to bestir to action all who have any regard for the moral welfare of our nation.

There are, it is true, individual cases in which no evil con-

sequences would result from a divorce—for example, when a marriage is childless and one of the parties is hopelessly insane or has been sent to prison for life. But even such unions are indissoluble by the law of nature. The precepts of the natural law have a *general* binding force and do not regard *particular* exceptional cases. If the law of nature permitted a single cause for divorce, how many husbands and wives, desirous of freedom, would use all manner of unlawful means to bring their case under this exception!

God has superadded positive precepts to the law of nature, emphasizing the indissolubility of matrimony. "A man shall *cleave* to his wife" was the divinely inspired pronouncement of Adam when marriage was instituted; and Christ explicitly asserted: "Whoever shall put away his wife and marry another, commiteth adultery against her. And if the wife shall put away her husband and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (*Mark,* X, 11-12). It is true, the Gospel of St. Matthew narrates that our Saviour once said: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, *except it be for fornication,* and shall marry another committeth adultery" (*Matthew,* XIX, 9). Did Christ here permit divorce in the case of marital infidelity? No, for even if these words be interpreted as referring to Christ's own law, it must be noted that the clause "except, etc." is joined only to the "putting away" and not to the "remarrying"; and the Catholic Church admits that mere *separation* by the innocent party is permissible in the case of marital unfaithfulness. Another interpretation of this text is that Christ was only explaining to the Pharisees the law of Moses which was still in force and which permitted divorce under certain circumstances. The Jews were of different opinions as to the cause required to justify a divorce, and our Lord asserted that only in the case of adultery could a man give his wife a bill of divorce.

St. Paul repeats in his Epistles Christ's law of indissolubility (*I Corinthians,* VII, 10—*Romans,* VII, 2, 3). The Fathers frequently emphasize in their writings the doctrine

that matrimony is a permanent union. As every one knows who has studied history, the Catholic Church has consistently upheld this doctrine despite the pressure brought to bear against her from powerful rulers. Thus, Pope Clement VII refused a divorce to King Henry VIII of England, although the result was the separation of that country from the Church. Pope Pius VII was made a prisoner by Napoleon because he would not grant that monarch a divorce from his lawful wife, Josephine.

Divine Dispensations

The arguments we have given against divorce with the right to remarry prove that matrimony cannot be dissolved by any *human* power, especially by the authority of the contracting parties themselves. But that does not say that *God* cannot grant divorces for sufficient reasons. The dissolution of the marital union is opposed to the *secondary* ends of matrimony—peace, love, etc.—and renders the bringing up of children, one of the primary ends of marriage, more difficult. It is not *directly* opposed to the *primary* purposes of the marital state, especially the generation of offspring. Accordingly, as can be seen from the principles explained in discussing the unity of marriage, God can give a dispensation from this law, when good reasons outbalance the evil effects.

The following general exceptions have actually been made by the Almighty from the beginning of the human race down to the present time:

(1) By the law of Moses a man was permitted to divorce his wife under certain circumstances. "If a man take a wife, and have her, and she find not favor in his eyes for some uncleanness; he shall write a bill of divorce, and shall give it in her hand, and shall send her out of his house" (*Deuteronomy*, XXIV, 1). The Jews themselves disputed about the meaning of "for some uncleanness" some interpreting it as only adultery, and others including under it very trivial reasons. This dispensation was probably extended also to the gentiles.

(2) According to a passage in St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (VII, 12-15), if two unbaptized persons have been married, and later one of them embraces the Christian faith and is baptized, and the other refuses to dwell with the convert, or renders the practice of religion very difficult to him or her, or is an occasion of sin—in such a case the Christian party is permitted to contract another marriage (with a Christian), thus dissolving the previous marital bond. According to Church law, there must be formal *interpellations* or questioning before this may be done—that is, the Christian party must ask the non-Christian if he or she is willing to be converted also, or at least to co-habit peacefully. This is called the Pauline Privilege.

(3) By the law of Christ the Catholic Church may, for good reasons, dissolve a marriage of two baptized persons which has not been consummated,* and also a marriage in which one party is baptized and the other unbaptized (whether it has been consummated or not). This power of the Church is known to us from tradition, manifested by the practice of the Pope—in whom alone this power is vested—for many centuries. It is one example of the general power "to bind and to loose" given by the Son of God to the rulers of His Church (*Matthew,* XVIII, 18).

The more extensive dispensation for divorce mentioned under (1) ceased with the promulgation of the Christian law. As is evident, the cases included under (2) and (3) are so definitely restricted by God and of such rare occurrence that they constitute no menace to the common good. In order to avoid conflict with the civil law, a clergyman of the Catholic Church would never officiate at a remarriage after an ecclesiastical divorce until a civil tribunal had also granted a divorce or an annulment of the previous matrimonial bond.

However, the Church possesses no power to break the tie of a sacramental marriage—in which both parties are bap-

* That is, the parties have not had any perfect marital relations subsequently to the sacramental marriage.

tized—and which has subsequently been consummated. Such persons are in the strictest sense married "for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, till death do us part."

Declarations of Nullity

Declarations of nullity—annulments, they are sometimes called—which are sometimes granted by the Catholic Church, are very different from divorces. A declaration of nullity is given when it is found, by an honest investigation, that a couple were actually *never married.* They may have lived together for some time as husband and wife but that fact does not validate a marriage which was null and void from the beginning. A few years ago the Church was bitterly attacked by many because the Roman tribunal of the Rota gave a declaration of nullity in the case of a marriage of a prominent couple who had been wed twenty-five years. The attack was utterly uncalled for since it was conclusively proved that at the time of the marriage the bride had been unjustly forced to give her consent and never subsequently gave a real marital consent. Hence, the marriage was null and void from the beginning and the intervening years of cohabitation had not made it a true marriage.

CHURCH LEGISLATION ON MARRIAGE

The Power of the Church

Objections are often hurled against the Catholic Church on the score that she interferes unduly in matters concerning marriage. We often hear it asked: "What right has the Church to tell a person whom he may marry and how he may marry? Isn't marriage a matter that concerns only the two individuals involved?"

A fair examination will show that these objections are based on an entirely false supposition. Marriage is not an affair that concerns only the two persons who make the

marital contract. It is a matter pertaining primarily to the good of society as a whole and must be subject to the jurisdiction of some public authority. In the case of unbaptized persons, as was previously stated, this public authority is the civil government; but in the case of baptized persons this public authority is the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is the Church established by Christ and Christ gave the rulers of His Church the right to regulate the spiritual affairs of all those whose souls bear the character of Baptism. Marriage is a sacred contract—in fact, in the case of two baptized persons it is always a sacrament—and hence the Church possesses the exclusive right to regulate the marriages of all baptized persons, whether Catholics or non-Catholics. Some of the Church's laws on marriage do not extend to those who are not her members. For example, the law that requires the presence of a priest does not hold where both parties are non-Catholics. Other laws bind Catholics and non-Catholics alike, such as the law which forbids, under pain of nullity, the marriage of persons within the third degree of blood relationship.

Impediments in General

A matrimonial impediment is a condition that prohibits a person from contracting marriage. An impediment is merely *prohibitive* if it renders marriage *unlawful* but not *invalid.* It is *diriment* if it makes the marital contract null and void. Some diriment impediments arise from the law of nature, such as physical impotence and the relationship between parent and child.* Similarly, the law of nature establishes the impediment of *bond*—that is, one bound by an existing marriage tie cannot marry again. Other impediments, both diriment and prohibitive, are constituted by the legislation of the Church. It is these with which we are especially concerned.

* In other words, the natural law invalidates a marriage between a father and his daughter or between a mother and her son.

Impediments in Particular

The following, according to ecclesiastical legislation contained in the Code of Canon Law which went into force in 1918, are matrimonial impediments.

(1) Age. A baptized boy cannot validly contract marriage until he has completed his sixteenth year, and a baptized girl until she has completed her fourteenth year. Some may think that the Church should demand greater maturity from those entering the state of matrimony but it must be remembered that ecclesiastical legislation is for the entire world, and in some regions the usual age for marriage is much earlier than that to which we are accustomed in the United States. Moreover, the Church law adds that priests should try to persuade young people not to be married before the age that is customary in their particular country.

(2) Blood Relationship. In the direct line of descent—parent, child, grandchild, etc.—every degree of blood relationship invalidates marriage. In the collateral line—brother or sister, cousins—this diriment impediment extends to the third degree inclusive. Consequently, a person may not marry a brother or sister,* or a first or second cousin. The degree of blood relationship is determined by the number of generations which separate the two persons from their common ancestor. Sometimes this is not the same for both, as in the case of uncle and niece. In this case the degree of relationship is measured by the one farthest removed from the common ancestor.

(3) Affinity. This diriment impediment can be incurred only by a person who has already contracted a sacramental marriage. It means that a man cannot marry the sister or the first cousin, the niece or the aunt of his former wife and a woman cannot marry the brother or the first cousin, the nephew or the uncle of her former husband. By reason of the same impediment, marriage with one related in

* This is probably prohibited by divine natural law.

any degree of *direct* blood relationship to a former spouse is also forbidden. Thus, a man could not marry the mother or daughter (by a previous marriage) of his former wife; nor could a woman marry the father or son of her previous husband.

(4) Public Decency. When a man and a woman have been living together as husband and wife but actually have not been married* there arises a nullifying impediment which prevents each of them from marrying the relatives of the other to the second degree in the direct line of blood relationship. Thus, a woman who has contracted an association of this nature could not marry the man's father or his son by another woman, nor his grandfather or grandson; nor could the man marry the woman's mother or her daughter by some other man, nor her grandmother or granddaughter.

(5) Spiritual Relationship. This arises from the sacrament of Baptism. When a person is baptized he acquires a spiritual relationship with the one who baptizes him and with those who act as his godparents. This relationship is a diriment matrimonial impediment. As far as marriage is concerned it usually does not make any difference from the standpoint of the baptizer, because ordinarily this is a priest. But it may have a practical bearing from the standpoint of the godparent. Thus, if a young man were preparing to enter the Catholic Church and subsequently to marry a Catholic young lady, he should not choose her as his godmother in Baptism. However, there is no spiritual relationship contracted by the godparents *toward each other.* Moreover, since May 19, 1918, no spiritual relationship arises between a sponsor at Confirmation and those for whom he acts as godparent.

(6) Consecration to God. Once a man has received the order of subdiaconate he cannot contract a valid marriage. The same is true of a religious, whether male or female, who

* This can occur either when there has been a marriage ceremony which was invalid, or when they are openly living in sin.

has taken what are known as *solemn* vows in his or her Order. The *simple* vows of religion render marriage only unlawful, not invalid, except in certain Religious Orders, such as the Jesuits, where by a special privilege of the Holy See the simple vows are a nullifying impediment.*

(7) Crimes. Certain determined crimes establish diriment impediments. Thus, if a man abducts a woman for the purpose of inducing her to marry him, or for the same purpose keeps her a prisoner, they cannot be married validly as long as she is in his power. Similarly, grave fear or violence unjustly inflicted on a person so that he or she is forced to enter marriage in order to be freed from it renders the marriage null and void. Moreover, the Church has established a specific impediment known as *crime,* which is concerned with two species of sin—adultery or murder or both—committed by a married person in collaboration with a third party (either married or unmarried) of the opposite sex. Thus, if a married man and a married woman commit adultery with each other, and agree to marry each other later on, they cannot subsequently contract a valid marriage with each other (without a dispensation) even if the lawful spouses of both were to die. Again, if a married woman with the aid of a man murders her husband this impediment arises between them, so that she cannot afterward marry that man.

(8) Mixed Marriages. The Catholic Church forbids the marriage of one who is a Catholic with a non-Catholic. In the case of a baptized non-Catholic, the impediment is merely prohibitive; in the case of a non-baptized person it is diriment. The reasons motivating this ecclesiastical legislation are many and grave. In mixed marriages the unity of mind and heart that should exist between husband and wife is lacking. It not infrequently happens that the peace of a household is destroyed, and husband and wife are per-

* Simple vows may be perpetual. The distinction between solemn and simple vows is based ultimately on the ruling of the Church.

manently alienated from each other by their difference of religious beliefs. Furthermore, there is danger that the Catholic party may, in the course of time, grow weak in his or her faith and this danger is even greater with respect to the children. Statistics show that about one-half of the children born of mixed marriages eventually are lost to the Catholic Church.

The Church sometimes grants Catholics permission to marry non-Catholics, but it is always with reluctance and regret. Before giving a dispensation the Church demands that there be a good reason for the marriage, that both parties promise that *all* the children be baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church, that the non-Catholic promise not to endanger the faith of the Catholic, and that there be moral certainty these promises will be fulfilled. Moreover, the Church commands that no other ceremony save the Catholic ceremony take place.

The Church also exhorts her members not to marry persons who were once Catholics but have since rejected Catholicism, even though they have not affiliated themselves with any other religious denomination. Similarly, the Church objects to the marriage of a Catholic with one who has joined a secret society condemned by the Church.

Since May 19, 1918, one who was baptized outside the Catholic Church and has not become a Catholic can validly marry an unbaptized person.

(9) Adoption. In a state or country where the civil law forbids the marriage of a person with one whom he or she has legally adopted, the Church establishes a like impediment —an impediment which is either prohibitive or diriment according as the civil law makes it one or the other.

(10) Vows. Certain simple vows—namely, the vows of virginity, and perfect chastity, the vows of not marrying, of receiving Holy Orders and of embracing the religious state—constitute prohibitive impediments to marriage.*

* See number 6 above.

The Church can give a dispensation from any impediment which she herself has established, but not from an impediment arising from the natural law. One who seeks a dispensation from an ecclesiastical impediment to matrimony must present a good reason; and the more important is the impediment in the eyes of the Church, the better must be the reason presented. If a person should present only false reasons in seeking a dispensation from one of the more important impediments—for example, a dispensation from the prohibition to enter a mixed marriage—the dispensation would be null and void.

The Form of Marriage

It is a law of the Church that when a Catholic contracts marriage, whether with another Catholic or with a non-Catholic, the ceremony must be performed in the presence of an authorized priest and at least two witnesses. If this law is not observed, the marriage is null and void in the eyes of the Church, even though it may be recognized by civil law. This law has been effective in the United States since April 19, 1908. This law does not bind two non-Catholics. Even a person who was baptized a Catholic but not brought up in that religion from the time he attained to the age of reason does not come under the scope of this law, provided at least one of his parents was a non-Catholic.

By an authorized priest we mean one who has the right by the law of the Church to assist at marriages in the place where the ceremony is performed. A bishop, for example, can officiate at marriages in any part of his diocese; a pastor in his parish. Moreover, a bishop can delegate a priest to perform the marriage ceremony within his diocese; and a pastor can do the same with respect to his parish.

There are two exceptions to this law. Both suppose that an authorized priest cannot be procured or approached without grave inconvenience. The first case occurs when one (at least) of the parties desiring to be married is in dan-

ger of death. The other case occurs when they are so situated that they can prudently foresee that the services of an authorized priest cannot be secured for a month. In either of these two cases the couple can be married by merely giving and receiving the conjugal consent in the presence of two witnesses.*

Conclusion

Married persons who have read this pamphlet should draw from its perusal the realization that theirs is a very holy state, symbolizing the union of Christ with His Church, bringing with it many grave obligations, yet also giving abundant helps by its sacramental efficacy toward the fulfilment of those duties. To any readers who may be preparing to enter the matrimonial state the author makes an urgent appeal to be obedient both to the laws of God and to the laws of the Church. For even as Christ was present at the marriage of Cana, so He will undoubtedly be present at the marriage of those Catholics who are faithful to His laws and to those of the Church, and who seek in the sacrament of Matrimony a source of grace and of happiness in this life and a means of enhancing their glory in the life to come.

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* If a man and a woman wished to marry, but they could not obtain even two witnesses and they could foresee that this condition would prevail for a long time—for example, if they were marooned on a desert island—they could contract a true marriage by merely expressing the marital consent to each other. In such a case the natural law would prevail over all positive legislation.

STUDY OUTLINE

MATRIMONY

Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important of human institutions At the present day respect for marriage is diminishing, especially in the United States. Hence, the teachings of the Catholic Church concerning marriage, which are the strongest bulwark of the family and state, should be known by all.

Marriage as a Natural Institution

(a) Marriage as a contract is a free and mutual agreement between a man and a woman giving each other the rights of husband and wife. Marriage is as old as the human race. It requires in the contracting parties physical and moral competency. The primary purpose of marriage is the generation and the bringing up of children; but it also has other ends, especially the mutual assistance given by husband and wife. To be valid, the matrimonial consent must be externally manifested, and must be in accordance with the laws of the competent *public authority.* In the case of baptized persons this public authority is the *Church;* in the case of the unbaptized, the *State.*

(b) Marriage as a state entails the obligations of cohabitation and mutual love, assistance and fidelity. The matrimonial state is lawful and honorable and, even when not sacramental, sacred. God's special blessing has been given to marriage from the beginning of the human race (*Genesis,* I, 28).

The Sacrament of Matrimony

(a) That Christian marriage is a sacrament is implied by St. Paul (*Ephesians,* V, 23-32), and is convincingly proved by the tradition of the Church, although it is uncertain just when Christ instituted this sacrament. It is supremely fitting that the important marital state should be sanctified and helped by special sacramental graces.

(b) The sacrament of marriage is the natural contract itself, elevated by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament. Hence, whenever two baptized persons are validly married, they necessarily receive the sacrament of Matrimony. The proximate matter of the sacrament is the *giving* of the marital right by each party to the other; the form is the *acceptance* by the other party, so that each confers the sacrament on the other. The marriage of a baptized person with one unbaptized is not a sacrament for either; but if the unbaptized party or parties of a marriage are baptized after they are married, their marriage probably becomes sacramental. To receive Matrimony *fruitfully* one must ordinarily be in the state of grace, but in certain cases this sacrament can remit mortal sin and give the state of grace.

(c) The sacrament of Matrimony worthily received confers sanctifying grace and a special sacramental grace, by which the recipient is given a claim to the actual graces needed for the fulfilment of the obligations of the marital state. It is the wish of the Church that Catholics be married at a Mass.

The Unity and the Indissolubility of Marriage

(a) Monogamy is prescribed by the natural law, and was commanded by God when He created our first parents (*Genesis,* II, 24). However, by divine dispensation, under the Old Law men were allowed to have several wives. Christ renewed the law of monogamy, and under the New Law no dispensations for polygamy are allowed.

(b) Indissolubility, which forbids the severance of the marital bond as long as both parties are alive, is also a property of marriage by natural law and by the special prescription of God (*Genesis,* II, 24). Christ also forbade divorce (*Mark,* X, 11-12), and the Catholic Church has always sustained this prohibition.

(c) Under the Old Law, by divine dispensation, divorce was permitted in certain circumstances (*Deuteronomy,* XXIV, 1). Under the New Law exceptions to indissolubility are found in the Pauline privilege (*I Cor.,* VII, 12-15) and in the power of the Church to dissolve a non-consummated sacramental marriage and the marriage of a baptized person with an unbaptized person. But the Church can never dissolve a *sacramental* marriage that has been *consummated.*

(d) A declaration of nullity, which is sometimes given by the Church, is not a *divorce* but is simply an offical assertion that a marriage has been invalid from the beginning.

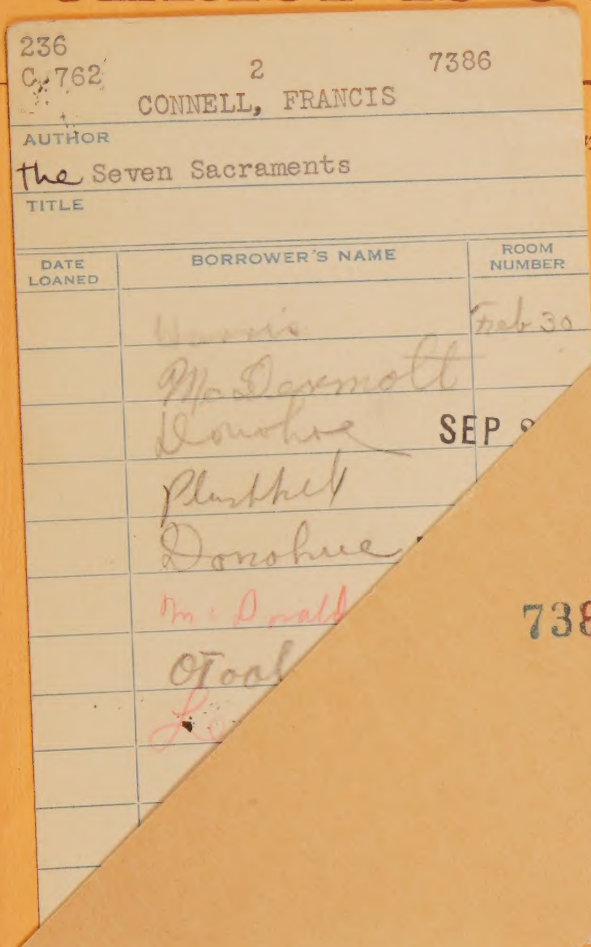
Church Legislation on Marriage

(a) The authority of the Church over the marriages of baptized persons is based on the principle that marriage, as an institution affecting society as a whole, must be under the jurisdiction of some public authority. But in the case of baptized persons this public authority is the Church because their marriage is a sacrament or at least (when only one is baptized) a sacred contract of a Christian.

(b) The Church has established certain matrimonial impediments, or conditions which prohibit those who are affected by them from contracting marriage. An impediment is *merely prohibitive* if it renders a marriage *illicit* but not invalid, *diriment* if it renders marriage also invalid. The chief impediments are those that are based on immaturity, the relationship of the parties, vows, certain grave crimes, difference of religious belief.

(c) By the law of the Church a Catholic cannot *validly* marry either another Catholic or a non-Catholic except in the presence of an authorized priest and two witnesses. However, there are two exceptional cases in which marriage may be contracted merely before two witnesses if an authorized priest cannot be had.

Conclusion

Married persons should be conscious of the holiness of their state, symbolizing as it does the union of Christ with His Church. Those who are preparing for this holy state should be most observant of the laws of God and of the Church, so that they may merit to have Christ Himself as a Guest at their wedding, even as He was present at the marriage-feast of Cana.

CHRIST IS GOD